

M O R A L
ENTERTAINMENTS
ON THE MOST IMPORTANT
PRACTICAL TRUTHS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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V O L II.

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C O N T E N T S

OF THE

SECOND VOLUME.

ENTERTAINMENT XXXIII.

A LL are bound to seek first the kingdom of God	Page	3
ENT. XXXIV. Practical inferences from the foregoing truth	—	16
ENT. XXXV. The danger of the world, and necessity of being armed against it	—	25
ENT. XXXVI. Means to preserve us from the corruption of the world	—	35
ENT. XXXVII. The emptiness and vanity of the world.	—	45
ENT. XXXVIII. Some practical inferences drawn from the foregoing truth	—	55
ENT. XXXIX. The happiness that attends a virtuous life	—	66
ENT. XL. Virtue sweetens all the sufferings of human life	—	74
ENT. XLI. Christ's love in suffering and dying for us	—	83
ENT. XLII. Christ the pattern of suffering christians	—	96
ENT. XLIII. Of Pharisaical virtue	—	107
ENT. XLIV. The danger of lukewarmness	—	118
ENT. XLV. Of spiritual martyrdom	—	132
ENT. XLVI. Of tempting God	—	143
ENT. XLVII. Of the blind beggar	—	153
ENT. XLVIII. The beggar's gratitude to CHRIST for his cure	—	163
ENT. XLIX. It is our duty to love our enemies	—	172
ENT. L. It is our interest to forgive and love our enemies	—	183
ENT. LI. The means to preserve peace with men, by avoiding contentiousness	—	192
ENT. LII. The same subject continued	—	202
ENT. LIII. Of devotion to the BLESSED VIRGIN	—	213
ENT. LIV. The same subject continued, and some directions relating to it	—	225
ENT. LV. The parable of the seed	—	234
ENT. LVI. The sin of concealment in Confession	—	248
VOL. II.		ENT.

C O N T E N T S.

ENT. LVII. The folly of concealing any sin in confession	260
ENT. LVIII. The fatal consequences of unworthy communications	269
ENT. LIX. CHRIST's love in instituting the Blessed Sacrament	281
ENT. LX. The returns we usually make our SAVI- OUR for his love	289
ENT. LXI. The advantage of afflictions	287
ENT. LXII. Motives of comfort in the sufferings of this life	308

M O R A L

M O R A L

ENTERTAINMENTS.

THE THIRTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

ALL ARE BOUND TO SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM
OF GOD.

Seek first the Kingdom of God. Mat. vi. 33.

THIS precept is short, but very comprehensive, since it contains the whole duty of man. For man's whole duty in this life, is to make God reign sovereignly in his heart by grace, in order to reign hereafter with God in glory. This, I say, is the whole duty of man; and all the moral precepts both of the Old and New Testament, are but so many explanations of the several branches of it. God commands nothing, but what he knows is necessary to fit us for the possession of his eternal kingdom; and he forbids nothing but what he knows will be a hindrance to it. He commands the practice of virtue, because *nothing that is defiled can enter into his kingdom*: So that the precept of *seeking first the kingdom of God*, is a summary of all christian morality; and if we made it but the rule of all our actions, it would alone suffice to render us eternally happy.

But alas! How few are governed by it! How few make Heaven their chief business, or employ their time so, as to give sufficient grounds to judge they prefer the *kingdom of God*, before

the pleasure or concerns of this life! If we consider the state of *christianity* in general, we shall find it sunk so low, that there will scarce appear any marks of it left to distinguish it from *paganism*, besides the bare name, and some outward forms, which cost nothing. We shall find calumny, backbiting, cursing and swearing, hatred, envy, and revenge, practised amongst the meaner sort: If we enter into the shops of tradesmen, how few shall we find there, who keep their hands clean from unjust dealing, and content themselves with a lawful gain! But if we mount a step higher, and take a view of those places, where justice ought to reign, and innocence find a secure sanctuary; here we shall see crimes of a blacker die: The laws perverted, innocence oppressed, justice sold, and clients ruined instead of finding relief.

However, christianity would not groan under so general a desolation, if it found but a protection amongst the nobility and gentry; who would doubtless be its principal ornament and support, if they had a sense of gratitude for the temporal advantages they have received from God. But it is from these, that christianity has received its most mortal wound. 'Tis amongst these vice appears barefaced, and without restraint. *Religion*, which has some respect paid it amongst the vulgar sort, is by men of quality treated with contempt: *Devotion* is a quality, which many of them are ashamed to own; and *libertinism*, which carries infamy with it in another state, lifts up its head amongst them, with the same assurance as the most unspotted virtue. Nay, many will rather boast of crimes they never committed, if they be but modish, than blush at those they are really guilty of.

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This is the unhappy state of christianity in general. The *kingdom of Satan* has spread itself over the whole face of the earth, and persons of all conditions flock to it: But the *kingdom of God* looks like a desert country, dispeopled and abandoned by its inhabitants. 'Tis true, there are some of all ranks and states, who, like *Lot* and *Noah*, remain untainted amidst the general corruption of mankind; are faithful to God's cause, and labour with a sincere zeal to establish his kingdom upon earth, and secure it to themselves in Heaven. But I fear that *Lot* and *Noah* are a figure of their number, as well as virtue, which made *Christ* pronounce with a kind of astonishment this terrible sentence: *The way which leads to life is narrow; and how few find it!* But the reason why few find it, is because few seek it: Yet all are bound to seek it, even before all other things as the words of my text expressly declare.

I shall therefore now endeavour to shew, that these words, *seek first the kingdom of God*, contain a precept of indispensable obligation; in which all christians, rich or poor, great or small, religious or laicks, are equally concerned: This is the whole subject of this entertainment.

To *seek the kingdom of God*, is the same as to make it our business to save our souls; and to *seek it first*, is to make it our chief business. So that the point in question (if it be any) is, whether all persons, of what rank or condition soever, are bound to make the saving their souls their chief business, and prefer it to all other concerns of this life? If practice were to be consulted in this case, or the decision of it depended upon numbers, it would certainly be carried in the negative: For the general practice

tice (as I have already observed) runs violently against it: And to judge by numbers we should be forced to conclude, that the words of my text contain a *counsel* rather than *precept*, and mark out only a securer way to Heaven; like the rule of some particular order, which all are not bound to follow.

But numbers and practice are of no weight against evident marks of christian morality. I shall insist upon two, to demonstrate the matter in question; tho' it be in a manner self-evident, and can scarce be set in a clearer light than its own.

The first is, that *all rational creatures are bound to make it their chief business to attain the end, for which they are created*: Because to do otherwise, is to set up their own wills in opposition to the will of God: 'Tis to withdraw themselves from the order of his Providence, and frustrate, as far as in them lies, the principal end of their creation. As to insensible or inanimate creatures, they are immediately directed to the end of their creation, by the unerring hand of the Creator, and serve as dead instruments, that never resist the hand, by which they are employed. How happy would man be, if he did that by choice, which they do by impulse or necessity! For, having received a rational soul, and, with it, a free will to choose good or evil, he has it in his power either to tend to, or swerve from, the end of his creation.

But what is this end? Why has God placed him in this world? Was it to make his abode for ever? Alas! the mortality of his body, and the continual change it was subject to, leave no room for this gross error; its term of life is fixed for a small number of years, it falls insensibly

sensibly into decay with age and diseases ; and so returns into dust : But man's better part, his soul, survives for ever ! And why has God bestowed upon him this immortal being ? Why has he given him a rational soul, with his own sacred image stamped upon it ? Was it to enslave her to the body, and make her an accomplice in its inordinate lusts ? What an ignoble end is this ! How far beneath the dignity of a spiritual and immortal being ! This therefore cannot be the end of our creation ; and we need to seek no farther for it than in the very alphabet of christian religion ; by which we are taught, that the end for which we are created, is to serve God in this life, in order to enjoy him eternally in the life to come. This end is perfectly proportioned to the dignity of an intellectual and immortal being : Because the noblest employment a creature can have, is to serve his Creator, and his sovereign happiness is to enjoy him. The service of an infinite majesty is suitable to the rank of a creature honoured with his sacred image ; and a life of immortality answers the noble ambition of an immortal soul ; nor can he aim at any thing lower without degrading himself.

We are then created, as you see, for two ends, *viz.* To serve God upon earth, and to enjoy him in Heaven. The first makes God our *sovereign Lord and Master* ; and the second our *sovereign happiness*. Let us then see, what both the one and the other oblige us to.

As he is the *sovereign Lord and Master* of the world, all rational creatures of what rank soever are his *servants* ; and all mankind, in relation to God, may be considered as one family, whereof he is Head ; and in which he has established a subordination of higher and lower degrees,

degrees, and assigned to every one his respective post, for the temporal as well as spiritual government of it: But he has made some general laws, delivered in the *ten Commandments*, which all are equally bound to obey. In these he has declared his holy will to all without exception: By these he has commanded kings as well as subjects, rich as well as poor, to own no sovereign lord and master but himself; to respect his holy name; to employ a day every week in religious duties; to honour those that have an authority over us, either by *nature*, or *divine* or *human laws*; finally, not to commit any of those crimes, which the law of nature itself, written in our hearts before it was engraven in tables of stone, forbids: These are the general laws, by which our heavenly Master commands all his servants to govern their lives and actions, upon pain of eternal damnation.

But are these all the duties he requires of his servants? I answer, that all particular duties may be reduced to them, as to their general heads; and therefore *Christ* being consulted by a young man, what he was to do to save his soul, gave him this brief answer; *Keep the commandments*. But since they are too short to express all particular duties, 'tis in this great family of the universe, as in all particular families whereof it is composed, each servant has his station or post assigned him, which marks out to him his employment, and the particular duties annexed to it: Whence arises the obligation every christian has, as he is a servant to God, to regulate his life and actions so, that it may be said, he employs his time, principally at least, in the service of his heavenly master. For what is principally the duty of a servant?
'Tis

'Tis to apply himself to his master's business. For, tho' it be indispensably required of him to be trusty, virtuous, and sober; yet, with these good qualities, he will be a very bad servant, if he be slothful, and neglects his master's concerns: And so it is with relation to the service of God. We are all born his servants; and the immediate end of our creation is, to serve him faithfully upon earth, according to the respective station he has placed us in. This is our indispensable duty; and a neglect of it is following our own wills preferable to the will of God, and perverting the order established by God's providence.

However, serving God upon earth is, as I have said, only the immediate end of our creation; but the last and principal end of it is, to enjoy God eternally: And the two ends are subordinate to one another; because our serving God on earth, is required as a means to enjoy him in Heaven. We are therefore born to serve him, because we are born to enjoy him; and our enjoying him in Heaven, will be the reward of our having served him upon earth; which made St. Paul write these excellent words, *Whether we live, we live for God; whether we die, we die for God; whether we live or die, we belong to God.*

Whence results again the indispensable obligation all rational creatures have to make their salvation (which is no other than the possession of God) the principal business of their lives. God has made himself our last end: We are therefore bound to regard him as such, in the main tendency of our lives and actions. The consequence is undeniable; because a rational creature cannot act deliberately, but for some last

last end; and whatever he makes his last end, he makes his God; so that if it be not God himself, it is some creature, which he substitutes in his place, and prefers before him. For which reason *St. Paul* expressly says, that a *glutton's belly is his God*, and he calls *avarice* the sin of *idolatry*; because money is the *idol* of a covetous man, to which he sacrifices all his thoughts and actions. Thus, glory is the *idol* of ambition; and a man that loves himself to that degree, as to consult in every thing chiefly his own ease, interest, or satisfaction, is properly said to be his own idol; because whatever he designs or does, is ordained to, and centers in himself.

These therefore make not God their last end, but set up their several idols in his place, to which they make a daily offering of the best part of their actions; and so do they, who make not their salvation the chief business of their lives. For how can these say, they make God their last end, since the main body of their actions has no tendency to him? It follows therefore, that they place their last end in something of this world; because since they cannot but act for some last end, if it be not God, it must be some creature: It follows again, that they live in a continual contradiction to the will of God, and such a contradiction as puts the greatest affront upon him. He has made them for himself; he has created them to serve and enjoy him. What honour, what happiness is this! But they are insensible of both; and refusing to answer these noble ends, prostitute their souls to some mean interest or pleasure, postpone God to some vile creature, and place their last happiness in the object of their prevailing passion. This is properly their crime,
who

who make not their salvation the chief business of their lives. This is the injustice they become guilty of in not *seeking first the kingdom of God*; which shews plainly, that the words of my text contain not a bare *counsel*, but a *precept* of the strictest obligation, in which all christians are equally concerned.

But the same is rendered still more evident from a *second* maxim of the christian law: I mean, from the close connection this duty has with the precept of *loving God above all things*; which *Christ* calls the *first and greatest commandment of the law*. This commandment is indeed of so large an extent, that all christian duties are included in it, as conclusions in their principle, from which they necessarily flow. But as some conclusions flow immediately, others more remotely from the same principle, we may say, that the duty of *seeking first the kingdom of God*, is of the former sort of conclusions, and has not only a necessary, but immediate connection with the great commandment of *loving God above all things*. In a word, it is so closely interwoven with it, that it is impossible either to comply with the one without the other, or transgress against the one, without transgressing against the other.

To make this evident, we need but consider what it is to love God above all things. I speak not of the love of God in its highest perfection: For this divine quality has undoubtedly its several degrees, and is always in its increase or wane, till it be fixed in Heaven, where it will be rewarded with a degree of glory, answerable to its merit and perfection in this life: But the love I speak of, is that which is absolutely necessary to salvation, and consists in an effectual preference of God before all things in this world:

So that the precept of loving God above all things, obliges us indispensably to give him the preference in our hearts to all creatures, in such a manner, as to be ready to sacrifice all things to him, be it honour, interest, or inclination, that pretends to stand in competition with him; in a word, to love God above all things, is to desire above all things to be united to him by grace in this life, and to possess him eternally hereafter.

Now what we are bound to desire above all things, we are bound to seek preferably before all things: For Almighty God contents himself not with mere barren desires, which produce no effect; as a husbandman would not be content with a tree that should only bear leaves, and bring forth no fruit: In effect, the desires of the heart are but as secret springs, that give motion to all the faculties both of soul and body, and apply them to action: Nay, 'tis impossible they should do otherwise, when they are sincere. Have we ever seen a covetous man sit idle, and not make it his principal business to hoard up money? Have we ever seen an ambitious man unactive in the pursuit of honour; or a voluptuous man without application in seeking his pleasures? No, surely, there never was an example of it; because whatever desire is predominant in the heart, the same produces naturally a series of actions, in which there appears not only a direct tendency to the object of that desire, but a certain eagerness in the pursuit of it.

The same is therefore to be said, when the love of God prevails in the heart: 'Tis impossible our practice should run quite counter to that love, or that Almighty God should have our hearts, whilst the world has all our actions:
Whence

Whence it follows, that if we sincerely love God above all things; we shall also seek him sincerely before all things; and if the possession of him be the principal object of our desires, it will also be the principal object of our application and pursuit, the consequence whereof is, that the same precept which commands us to love God, that is, to value and desire the possession of him above all things; commands us likewise to make the securing this happiness to ourselves, the chief business of our lives.

The obligation then admits of no dispute, and its extent is as unquestionable; it reaches all mankind, and every stage of life, from the use of reason, is concerned in it: For, in effect, what is man's life in this world designed for by Almighty God, but to be a passage to a better? So that, from the very moment of our entrance into this mortal state, we are as passengers upon our way to the other, which is immortal. During our infancy, indeed, baptismal grace alone suffices to secure us of the everlasting possession of Almighty God: But when we grow up to the use of reason, and become full masters of our own free wills, to chuse good or evil, 'tis then we come within the obligation which no human power can dispense with, of *seeking first the kingdom of God*: And this obligation remains in full force as long as we live; and whoever discharges himself faithfully of it, is sure to find, at the end of his mortal race, the happy eternity he has sought.

THE THIRTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THE FOREGOING TRUTH.

Seek first the kingdom of God. Mat. vi. 33.

IN my last discourse, I have fully represented the obligation of *seeking first the kingdom of God*; but since it follows hence, that all transgressors against this duty cannot but be out of the way of salvation, it will be necessary to examine, who they are that may be said to comply or not comply with it; which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

Whoever finds in himself a strong inclination to please God in every thing, and fears nothing more than to offend him, receives afflictions as coming from the hand of God, with an entire submission to him; uses the things of this world according to the order of his Providence; and is ready in his heart to part with them, rather than do any thing contrary to the principles of religion or the dictates of his conscience. Such a one may be truly said to *seek first the kingdom of God*; that is, to make the salvation of his soul the chief business of his life: And the contrary judgment must be made of those, who find not these dispositions prevailing in their hearts.

Whence it follows, *first*, That they who get a livelihood by any unlawful means; or live in any habit of mortal sin, are far from *seeking first the kingdom of God*; because their continuing wilfully in a state, which excludes them from that kingdom, is a manifest proof, that they prefer the object of some criminal passion before it. The same is to be said of those, who in their discourses preach up any custom or
practice

practice flatly condemned by the gospel, or are resolved in their hearts to conform themselves to it, if an occasion should present itself.

I speak particularly of the detestable practice of duels; which is so generally maintained by persons of both sexes, that I can scarce remember I ever heard a laick speak against it: I have sometimes ventured to represent the foulness of it in true colours; but it was the same as reasoning against a hurricane; and I never got any thing but laughter for my pains, as if I had maintained the most ridiculous paradox in the world.

Nobody indeed pretends to say, in express terms, that duelling is no sin; because the very first principles of religion would give him the lie: But, whether sin or no sin, most discourses I have heard upon this subject, tended to make it appear a thing so *necessary* and *indispensable*, that whoever should scruple it, on certain occasions, was set forth as a man of lost honour; and as unfit to shew his head; as one branded with the infamy of cowardice. Thus an abhorrence of murder, or not venturing to leap headlong into hell-fire, is represented as cowardice; and imitating the *patience* and *humility* of *Jesus Christ*, has a mark of infamy set upon it in these unchristian discourses.

In effect, if such discourses be not highly criminal, christianity is a jest; the gospels ought to be burnt, and the four *Evangelists* condemned, as authors of a morality that renders men infamous, and unworthy to be reckoned among men of honour: But why is not the fifth Commandment, *Thou shalt not murder*, struck out of the decalogue? It is certainly unjust, if duelling may be lawfully encouraged: Nay, why is an infamous death its punishment even

even by all human laws? For can it enter into the thoughts of a man of sense, that an infamous punishment should be the just reward of an action, that is not only honourable, but is indispensable and necessary? 'Tis therefore manifest, that nothing but the instigation of the devil, can make men stand up in defence of a practice which has all laws, both human and divine, against it: The law of God forbids it; the gospel condemns it; the law of nature cries out against it; the civil law punishes it as an infamous crime; and the laws of the Church express their abhorrence of it, by excommunicating the parties concerned, and denying christian burial to the unhappy victims of it. A cause must certainly be very infamous, to lie under so many heavy condemnations!

But it is foreign from my purpose, to enter any farther into the nature of it, or unmask its whole deformity; my only business is to shew, that they, who are disposed in their heart to conform themselves to this mad custom of the world, are not in the number of those who *seek first the kingdom of God*, or make their salvation their chief concern; since they are disposed to prefer the esteem of men, nay, of fools and madmen, before God's favour: their hearts are therefore criminal, though their hands remain innocent; and they who encourage them to it by their discourses, are accomplices with them in their crime.

But I shall now turn my discourse to another sort of worldly persons: Those I mean, who express indeed an abhorrence of all vice, yet pass their lives in a kind of regular circle of unprofitable amusements, or what the world calls innocent divertisements and pleasures; and the question is, whether these persons may
be

be said to make their salvation their *chief business*.

I will first answer it, by proposing another of the same nature, *viz.* Whether a steward or any other servant that should daily spend the best part of his time in diverting himself, may with any colour of truth, be said to apply himself chiefly in his master's business? The two cases seem to be exactly parallel; and if men's judgments were as unbiassed in things relating to their salvation, as they are in reference to their temporal concerns, I cannot doubt but the case of the *idle christian* would appear full as bad as that of the *idle servant*.

But, to give a direct answer to it, I shall lay down a principle, which appears to be self-evident, *viz.* *Whoever leads a life made up of such actions, as are no ways referable to Almighty God, cannot in any measure be said to make his salvation his chief business*; because, since nothing is conducing to salvation, but what is *referable to God*, it follows, that all such actions, as are not referable to him, are not *conducing to salvation*. And by consequence a person, who leads a course of life chiefly made up of such actions, cannot be said to make his salvation his *chief business*; for that alone can be called a man's chief business, in order to which his time is chiefly employed, and at which his actions chiefly aim.

Now then let us confront a life of pleasure with the principle I have laid down, and see whether it can stand the test. Can any man without intending to mock God, make an offering to him of an idle and unprofitable life? Can he have the confidence to tell him, it is for his sake he daily spends the greatest part of his time, in passing from one diversion to another?

That

That it is for love of him, he daily studies to gratify his own inclinations and humour? Finally that it is in compliance with his holy will he leads a life of ease, of idleness, and pleasures? I scarce can think a person, that has any sense of conscience or religion, dare, with a serious reflection, use this language to Almighty God, or make him an offering of such a course of life.

If you ask, how is it possible, that a person supposed to be free from vice, should be out of the way of salvation? I answer, it is very possible; because he may be guilty of *mortal sin*, though he be free from what the world usually calls *vice*; and every mortal sin is an obstacle to salvation. Thus *Lucifer* and his angels were condemned, without being guilty of that sort of vice; the *Pharisees* were condemned by *Christ*, though he never accused them of any gross vice; the *five foolish virgins*, though virgins, were excluded from the marriage feast, because they had not their *lamps trimmed*; and the *slothful servant* stands recorded as condemned in the gospel, though he was only convicted of not having improved his master's talent: Whence it follows, that there are many sins, besides those the world calls *vice*, which will exclude us from the kingdom of God: For there are mortal sins of *omission*, as well as *commission*; there are mortal sins of *thought*, as well as *deed*; and *pride* and *sloth*, which are in the number of *capital sins*, may become as mortal as *luxury* and *intemperance*.

The only question then is, what those who live idly, and chiefly study their pleasures, are guilty of? I answer their most remarkable sin is *sloth*; which consists chiefly in a gross and supine neglect of their souls' salvation. Their sin

is their being their own *idols*, and seeking to please themselves more than Almighty God. Finally their sin is their leading a life irreconcilable with the sacred maxims of the gospel.

I shall quote some few, pronounced by *Christ*, to shew I am not guilty of exaggeration. *The way (says Christ) that leads to life is narrow—Unless ye do penance, ye shall all perish,—He that takes not up his cross and follows me, is not worthy of me.—Strive to enter by the narrow gate.—Be watchful and pray, that you enter not into temptation.* And how does a life of idleness and pleasures agree with these sacred maxims? Can it be called the *narrow way*? Is it a life of *penance*? Is it the way of the *Cross*? Is it *following Christ*? Is it entering by the *narrow gate*? Finally, is it a life of *watchfulness* and *prayer*? The contrary is so evident, that to go about to prove it, would be labouring rather to obscure than clear the truth. We need not then be long in searching out the sin they are guilty of: *It* shews itself plainly to those that will but open their eyes to see it.

However, I cannot but observe, that the supposition of their *keeping within the bounds* of every thing that is lawful in itself, seems somewhat speculative, and is scarce to be found in practice. The reason is, because since even those, who apply themselves to the practice of penitential works, are not free from dangerous temptations, and have difficulty enough to resist vice; it seems very extraordinary that they, who chiefly study their pleasures, should keep wholly free from it: And therefore, it appears far more probable, that the same root of self-love, and the same principle of not denying themselves any thing they have a mind to, within the bounds of what seems lawful, will by degrees become

become as prevalent upon them, in relation to pleasures of another kind, when they present themselves: especially if we consider, that there appears nothing in their lives to entitle them to those assisting graces, without which corrupt nature will easily be overcome, by these frequent allurements and assaults of vice: And so we may conclude, without danger of rash judgment, that a life without rule or order, a life of idleness and pleasures, finally, a life of humour and inclination, attended with a great neglect of prayer and the sacraments, will not keep long from being concerned in something more, than what falls within the reputed limits of innocent and lawful.

There remains but one point more to be cleared, with which I shall end, *viz.* how persons, who employ the most considerable part of their time in wordly concerns, as many are necessitated to do, may be said to make their salvation their chief business? In answer to it, I may lay down a *second* undoubted maxim, *viz.* *That whatsoever is referable to God, may be rendered conducive to salvation.* Now of this nature are all temporal employments; that is the duties of any honest and lawful calling, wherein men are engaged by the order of divine Providence: For since the government of the world is put immediately into the hands of men, it is the order of God that every one should be faithful in performing the duties of the station, wherein he has placed him. So that, tho' *temporal* and *spiritual*, that is, the concerns of this life, and those of the life to come, seem very opposite to one another, yet the *temporal* may be made subservient to the *spiritual*, and the concerns of this life and those of the next, by being offered up, *first* in conformity to the will of God; and *secondly*,

condly, in the spirit of penance: Because all duties whatever, being a restraint upon our inclinations, which naturally carry us to liberty and ease, they may all be put into the number of penitential works, and rendered such in effect, by a sincere oblation of the heart. Whence it plainly follows, that, though the most considerable part of a man's time be employed in worldly concerns, he may nevertheless be said to make his salvation his chief business, provided his labours be attended with the disposition I have mentioned, and no essential duty of a christian life be neglected.

This caution is very necessary; because though temporal employments be not, of their own nature, a hindrance to salvation, they may be rendered so by an over-solicitude, or a neglect of duties commanded: For a man may be too busy, as well as too lazy to save his soul; and there are many, who instead of making their temporal employments instrumental to their salvation, sacrifice their salvation to their temporal employments: their hearts are so taken up with the cares and solitudes of this life, that Almighty God and the concerns of their future state, can scarce find any room in their thoughts: And by this mismanagement their souls are insensibly starved, for want of sufficient nourishment of prayer, and the sacraments, so indispensably necessary to support their spiritual life and health: Whereas, if they took this seriously to heart, they might easily contrive matters so, that neither the spiritual nor temporal should be neglected. For as no pretence of business can hinder them from daily nourishing the body, or providing for its cure, when it is indisposed; so ought it not to hinder them from daily affording a sufficient nourishment of
prayer.

prayer to the soul, nor from taking timely care of its cure, when its labours under any spiritual distemper.

I shall conclude, with repeating once more the words of my text, *seek first the kingdom of God*. A christian, to speak properly, has no other business in this world, than that of saving his soul; because it is for that alone God has bestowed life upon him; and all other concerns ought to be subordinate, and made instrumental to it: And therefore our Saviour calls it *the only necessary thing*; because it is alone of indispensable necessity. *What will it avail a man, says Christ, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?* What will it indeed avail us, to have abounded in wealth, if, after the short course of this life, we fall into everlasting misery and want? What will it avail us to have enjoyed all the pleasures of this world, if we be hereafter condemned to everlasting torments? What will it avail us to have gratified our inclinations, indulged our senses, and led an easy and merry life for some few years, if, after that short term of time, we begin a painful and unhappy eternity?

But, how unfortunate are those poor wretches, who take a great deal of pains in this world, perhaps to lose their souls in the next? They lead a toilsome and laborious life, groan under continual cares and solitudes, and endure great hardships and fatigues; yet all the while, by the neglect of some easy duties, which would be a means to sanctify all their works, gain nothing in order to a happy eternity; so that all their toil and labour, though penitential in itself, and capable of being made a means to obtain life everlasting, if it were sincerely offered up in the spirit of penance, and, in conformity

conformity to the will of God, remains fruitless, for want of his holy disposition; and is like a treasure locked up, which lies dead, and turns to no account to its owner: Whereas, if they laboured for God at the same time that they laboured for bread, their pains would be rewarded with everlasting joys.

THE THIRTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE DANGER OF THE WORLD, AND NECESSITY OF
BEING ARMED AGAINST IT.

We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in wickedness. John v. 19.

THE general corruption of the world, is the great source of sin, and a powerful incentive to it. That therefore we may be made sensible of the necessity of being strongly guarded against it (for which I shall give some directions in my next discourse) the subject of this entertainment shall be to represent the danger to which we are exposed, of being tainted with the spirit of the world, and the obligation arising from it to arm ourselves against this danger.

If the love of the world were a harmless or indifferent thing, there could be no danger in conversing with it: But our very baptismal vows, by which we have renounced the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*, are a demonstrative proof that the *world* is one of the three capital enemies of God and our souls, against which we are bound to fight as long as we live: But tho' we were not under the obligation of these vows, both *Christ* and his *apostles* have pronounced so peremptorily against the *world*, and the lovers of it, that it is impossible to espouse their cause, without

without declaring ourselves enemies to *Christ* and his doctrine.

Let us first hear *Christ* himself speak : He tells us, *First*, That *the world hates him*, John xv. 18. *Secondly*, That *it neither sees, nor knows, nor can receive the spirit of truth*, John xiv. 17. *Thirdly*, That *its works are evil*, John vii. 7. And *Fourthly*, That *as the world has hated him, so will it also hate his disciples, because they are not of the world, but he has chosen them out of the world*, John xv. 19.

Thus is the world stigmatized by *Christ* ; nor are the *apostles* more favourable to it. Hear then what character they give of it. *Be not conformed to the world*, says St. Paul, Rom. xii. 2. St. James seconds him in this matter. *Know ye not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God ; whoever therefore will be a friend of this world, is the enemy of God*, James iv. 4. And St. John is no less severe upon it. *The whole world lies in wickedness*, 1 John v. 19. And again, *If any man (says he) loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him : For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*, 1 John ii. 15.

You must own these texts are very frightful, if we consider how great a number of worldly christians are flatly condemned by them : For 'tis impossible to read them, and not be convinced that the love of the world is a mortal poison to the soul, as being inconsistent with the love of God, that is, with a condition essentially necessary to salvation.

It remains then only to consider the danger, to which we live exposed, of being ourselves infected with this poison. This danger proceeds principally from our being under a necessity of
keeping

keeping company with those, who are already more or less tainted with it. For 'tis by the mutual intercourse of *seeing, hearing, and discoursing*, that all our ideas, nay, even inclinations, whether good or bad, are in some measure formed; tho' with this remarkable difference, that the influence of bad company is usually more prevalent than that of good; because virtue meets an opposition and vice a conformity in our nature; so that, as bodies which are unsound and full of bad humours, are apt to take any sort of infection; so our nature, corrupted by original sin, and of itself prone to evil, easily sucks in the spiritual distempers of those with whom we converse: And therefore 'tis no wonder, that by daily *hearing the discourse*, and *seeking the example* of persons, whose heads and hearts are full of the world, we should be in danger of being influenced by them in our principles as well as practice, and be insensibly drawn into the easy broad way of the world, which leads to everlasting perdition.

First then, as to the danger of their *discourse*, 'tis a known truth, that *the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart*: And therefore, as lungs that are tainted cannot but cause a foul breath, so a heart tainted with the love of the world, will naturally produce discourses suitable to that passion. Consider but what subjects the entertainments of the world usually run upon: Has God Almighty any share in them? Do they ever put us in mind of the concerns of eternity? Alas, to set on foot a discourse of piety, in any public assembly, is become as great a trespass against good manners, as to affect to speak a language the company does not understand: Nay, the very design of worldly conversation, is what we call to *divert*; that is, to
draw

draw the mind from the thought of every thing that is serious, and amuse it with such objects as are most agreeable to corrupt nature ; so that the greatest part of worldly assemblies is composed of persons, who meet together for no other end, than to entertain one another with something relating to that object, which takes up the chief place in their affections : each one being most delighted in setting off the idol of his own prevailing passion, whether it be honours, riches, or pleasures, or whatever the thing be to which he is most inclined by nature : And as it is their love and esteem of these things, that make them take a pleasure in discoursing of them, so it gives them a certain natural eloquence, to set them off to the best advantage, and at the same time to inspire others with the same esteem and love of them : For all discourses of this nature are properly the language of men's passions ; and as they are prompted by their passions, so they serve only to enkindle them in others. 'Tis by these, and other such like entertainments, we inflame each other with the love of the world : 'Tis by these we foment and nourish our corrupt inclinations, encourage pride and vanity, and insensibly work up men's hearts into such a value and esteem of earthly things, as at last may prove mortal poison to the soul.

The reason hereof is very plain ; because we need no other sin, to lose our souls for ever, than to love any thing in this world so, as in our hearts to prefer the possession of it, before the friendship of Almighty God : 'Tis true, it often happens, that we know not how deep a root the love of the things of this world has already taken in our hearts ; because, for want of occasion, we have not yet been put to the proof, whether

whether God or those things be dearer to us : But whether we do, or do not know it, 'tis very certain, that naturally speaking, nothing contributes more to heighten our esteem and love of any thing, than to hear it continually praised, and admired by those we daily converse withal : And since it is likewise evident, that the greater esteem and love we have for any thing, the more unwilling we are to part with it ; it follows, that our affection to the things of this world may be insensibly heightened to such a degree, that when by any trial we are put to the choice to renounce either them, or the grace and friendship of Almighty God, the world may be grown too hard for our duty ; and it happens but too often in the unfortunate examples of those who renounce their religion to save their estates, or attain to some preferment at court : For 'tis plain that the love of the world prevails in their hearts, and determines them to that unhappy choice with the utter ruin of their souls.

However, though the *language* of the world be so very dangerous, as I have shewn : its *example* carries much more danger with it ; for words would, in some measure, lose their force, were they not seconded by a suitable practice : But the children of this world speak more effectually by their deeds, than with their tongues ; and shew evidently, from the unequal distribution of their solicitude, time, and expence, between the concerns of this life and the other, where their heart and treasure lies. Now, is there any thing more catching than a general example, especially when it favours our natural inclinations ? Is there any thing influences our judgments, and by consequence our wills,

more powerfully, than the constant practice of those we converse with?

I need not offer one familiar instance to convince you of this truth: That which makes so great a noise in the world, and is called the *Mode*, is nothing but the general example of some town or country, which is so irresistably prevalent, that it seems to drag men to a certain necessity of compliance; for let a thing be ever so inconvenient, expensive, or even so absurd in itself, if it be the *Mode*, if it be the custom and practice of others, and generally authorized by example, it is almost in vain to speak against it, and very few have the courage not to conform themselves to it; insomuch that it is become a common proverb, That a man had as good be out of the world, as out of the fashion: And pray consider, whether any mode be more general, than to live according to the spirit and maxims of the world; or whether there be any thing more antiquated and worn out of fashion, than to live up to the sacred maxims of the gospel? For alas! how few are there, even of those that are not noted for any scandalous irregularities, whose lives may be said to have a conformity to the faith they profess? What proof do they give, that Heaven is their principal concern, and salvation the chief business of their lives? They say, indeed, they love God above all things, but their actions seem to speak another language; since their small and negligent application to the duties of religion, is no great sign that their hearts and treasure are in Heaven: and their spending the largest part of their time in studying their divertisements and pleasures, is but too convincing a proof, that their chief business is not to serve God, but to please themselves.

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Since then we may conclude, that the world is full of danger, both in regard of its *discourse* and *example*, the two things which doubtless have a very great power over man's will, and influence upon his actions; it will now be an easy task to prove the obligation we all have to arm ourselves against it: For it appears, from what has been said, that our condition in this world is much the same as that of a person who is forced to swim for life against a rapid stream; whom therefore we should give over for lost, if he should leave off struggling against it. Our case, I say, is much the same; for the corruption of the world is an impetuous torrent, that strives to carry all before it, and whose violence is very hard to be resisted; yet we must either resist it, or perish in it; for since our circumstances oblige us to live in the midst of this torrent, we have but one way to save ourselves, which is resolving to struggle against it, by the use of such holy exercises as are most proper to preserve us from being overcome by it.

I know it is a common error amongst wordly persons to imagine, that living up to the maxims of the gospel belongs only to religious persons, or such as are wholly retired from the world. Both St. Basil and St. Chrysostom complain, that many in their time were under this mistake; and I find the ground of it to be no other than a wrong or imperfect notion of christianity: For, whoever will but seriously consider what it is to be a *Christian*, and what we are obliged to precisely, by virtue of that character, will soon be convinced, that there is no difference between *religious* and *laicks*; as to any essential duty or virtue taught by *Christ*, and commanded in the gospels. *Thou deceivest thyself*, (says St. Chrysostom) *and art grossly mistaken, if*

thou imaginest that one thing is required of seculars, another of monks. The reason whereof is clear, because we can have no other notion of virtue or perfection, than what the gospel itself has marked out; and the gospel was writ and published for all sorts of callings. *Dost thou think* (says St. Basil) *that the gospels were not also written for married persons?* And he continues thus: *Let us not doubt, but of whatever calling we be, we shall be demanded an account of them, as well as hermits and religious.*

In effect, *religious and laicks*, considered precisely as *Christians*, are all of the same order: We have all made the same *vows*, viz. of renouncing the devil, with all his pomps and works; we have all the same *founder*, viz. *Jesus Christ*, from whom we take our name, and whose disciples we profess to be; we have all the same *rule* to live by, viz. the *gospel*; the same *end* to aim at, viz. *perfection*; and the same *reward* to hope for, viz. *life everlasting*. This is the great order of *christianity*; and, beyond all dispute, the noblest that ever was instituted; whether we consider the dignity of its founder, the holiness of its rule, the purity of its doctrine, the sublimeness of its end, or, finally, the number and illustrious characters of the persons enrolled in it: The greatest monarchs upon earth, glory in being not only members, but protectors of this holy order; and are as much obliged to observe all its rules, as those who live in cloysters, and are wholly sequestered from the world.

Whence it follows, that there is not any virtue commanded by the gospel, which all are not bound to aspire to, as well as the most rigid monks. All have the same obligation to *love God above all things, and their neighbour as themselves*

selves: To have their hearts disengaged from the love of the world; to use violence to their inclinations, and do penance for their sins; finally, to be *humble, meek, penitent*, and resigned in all things to the will of God. Are not all men equally concerned in these maxims delivered by *Christ*; *Whoever will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.—Whoever loves his father or mother, son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.—Whoever takes not up his cross, and follows me, is not worthy of me.—I have set you an example, that you may also do as I have done*: Were not the following instructions addressed to all; *Be watchful, for ye know not the day nor hour.—Seek first the kingdoms of God.—Unless you do penance, ye shall likewise all perish*: And is not then plain what *St. Basil* teaches, that all will be judged by these maxims in the great day of accounts: If so, then all are equally bound to make them the rule of their lives; and in this respect, there is no difference between *religious* and *seculars*, the *clergy* and *laity*, since these are *Christians* as well as the other; that is, disciples of the same crucified *Christ*, marked with the same spiritual character, members under the same head, redeemed with the same precious blood, and tending to the self-same end.

This then being an undoubted truth, *viz.* that living in the world exempts no man from any duty of a christian life, I leave every one to judge, whether persons engaged in this state can pretend to comply with the obligation incumbent on them, without daily arming themselves against the dangers and temptations to which they live exposed; they are all bound to live according to the spirit of the gospel; and that, amidst a corrupt world, which, by the allure-
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ment of its discourse and example, is a continual snare to them: They are therefore bound of course to employ such means, as are proportioned to the task they have upon their hands, and the difficulties that attend it.

'Tis true they are not tied down to the same means as persons engaged in a religious state: Because, tho' they be excellent in themselves, they are not suitable to all conditions. However, since, as *Christians*, they are bound to have the self-same end in view; whatever means they make choice of, they must be such as will answer the end they aim at. Nay, as their dangers and temptations are greater, their watchfulness to secure themselves ought to be so too. Persons shut up in cloisters are, as it were, in a safe harbour; but they who live in the world, are in the midst of a tempestuous sea. Religious are as an army strongly intrenched, with the particular laws and constitutions of their order; but laicks are in the open field, encompassed with many enemies: And therefore, next after the protection of Almighty God, on whose assisting grace they must depend in every thing, they have nothing but their own watchfulness, and spiritual arms to trust to. So that the obligation of keeping a strict guard upon themselves, and being always in a posture of defence, is rather more pressing upon these than the other. Because all are equally bound to conquer, and laicks have at least one very dangerous enemy upon their hands more than religious, *viz.* the *world*, which they must overcome, as well as the other enemies of their salvation,

THE THIRTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

MEANS TO PRESERVE US FROM THE CORRUPTION
OF THE WORLD.

*This is the victory, that overcometh the world, 1
John v. 4.*

THE danger of the world, and the necessity of being strongly fortified against it, have been fully represented in my last discourse. I presume then it will not be unacceptable to have some directions how this is to be done; which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

Suppose it were our misfortune to live in a town infected with the plague, and that our temporal concerns would not permit us to remove from it; let us consider seriously, what we should do in that case, to preserve ourselves from catching the distemper: For if we have but the same solicitude, and use the same precautions, to secure ourselves against the corruption of the world, as we would do to avoid the plague, we may, with the help of God's grace, live as untainted in the world, as *Lot* did in the midst of *Sodom*.

First then, in the case supposed, it is certain we should endeavour to keep at the greatest distance possible from all persons and houses infected with it. *Secondly*, If there were a good wholesome air upon any neighbouring hill, we should walk thither for health, as often as our domestic affairs would permit us. And *Thirdly*, we should not neglect the use of antidotes or preservatives, recommended by the ablest physicians. These, doubtless, are the precautions all rational men would make use of for their security in the case supposed, and may therefore
serve

serve for directions to all christians, what they must do to save their souls amidst the general contagion of the world.

In the first place, therefore, there are certain persons infected in a more notorious degree than others, whose company is to be avoided as much as possible : I principally mean, professed libertines, and such as in their discourse affect to make a jest of religion, and turn its most sacred maxims into ridicule. These are the very rankest bane and poison of souls in conversation ; and it is without dispute, that of all sorts of unchristian discourses, *prophaneness* is the most pernicious and destructive to piety and virtue : *First*, Because it strikes at the very root of all christian morality, and *secondly*, because it does in the most effectual manner possible, *viz.* by way of raillery and banter ; which being a diversion to the company, is usually listened to with pleasure, and therefore makes a deeper and more lasting impression. It is by this prophane buffoonry, that morality is brought into contempt, that men are made ashamed to speak and act like christians ; and many who would not easily have been seduced any other way, have been laughed out of all principles of religion.

These persons therefore are to be avoided as the plague. *The poison of asps is under their lips*, Psalm xiii. 4. *Their tongues are a world of iniquity, and set on fire of hell*, James iii. 6. For they are not content barely to preach up the world, but labour to do the devil's work for him a shorter way. Their profession is to run down christianity, to set up atheism, and turn religion out of doors.

But as the company of these prophane scoffers and deriders of religion is manifestly dangerous,

gerous, so there are also certain *places*, where the spirit of the world reigns much more absolutely than elsewhere; and are therefore more contagious, especially if they be much frequented. Amongst these, the *theatre* has a mark set upon it by all spiritual writers: For 'tis there the world appears in its greatest pomp, and dressed up in all its most tempting allurements: 'Tis there the men's eyes and ears are entertained with objects most agreeable to flesh and blood: 'Tis there in fine, our natural passions are not only flattered, but heightened and inflamed to a very great degree. *Love*, the most dangerous and violent of passions, reigns upon the stage, and is its principal support. *Ambition* and *revenge* are treated with honour, rewarded with success, and set forth, in most tragedies, as accomplishments necessary to make a great man: And as for characters represented in comedies, even those that are counted perfect, and proposed as patterns for imitation, have usually a mixture of such qualities, as would flatly damn a man, if he were found guilty of them at the hour of death.

However, I will not pretend to assert positively, that it is unlawful ever to go to a play: I will only lay down some maxims, which can admit of no dispute. *First*, All those who find by experience, that going to plays is to them an immediate occasion of sin, or at least a great incentive to it, are bound in conscience to deprive themselves wholly of that diversion. *Secondly*, when the language, design, or representation of any play is notoriously immodest, 'tis unlawful to be present at it; because the danger in that case is manifest; and *he that loves danger shall perish in it*. Whence it follows, *Thirdly*, that to take the chance of a play, without

being any ways informed of its character, is to run the hazard of offending God mortally. And *Fourthly*, that those who make a custom of going indifferently to all, may judge positively of themselves, that an innocent diversion is not the chief motive of their going.

But the surest rule, and which nobody can call in question, is, that the less all places of public spectacles are frequented, the better it is, because the safer: Which is reason enough in any case, wherein the life or health of our bodies is concerned: For then no man amuses himself with examining how great or little the danger of infection is in such or such companies or places; but if any danger at all be reasonably suspected, there needs no more to determine any man to avoid them as much as possible. If then our souls were as dear to us as our bodies, we should act upon the same principle, and by the same rule, in all cases in which our spiritual life or health is in any measure concerned. Instead of examining nicely the degrees of danger, our sole care would be to inform ourselves impartially, whether there were any at all; and if any were discovered, we should take the same measures for the safety of our souls, as we do for that of our bodies. If this rule were observed, all public spectacles, which no man doubts but are attended with some degree of danger, would be as little frequented, as houses that are cried down for being haunted with evil spirits, or infected with a contagious air.

However, it is not enough to avoid all companies and places where the danger is greatest; because all worldly conversation is attended with danger enough, to oblige all christians to be upon their guard, and use means to fortify themselves

themselves against it: And therefore we must also have recourse to the second sort of precaution, which we should make use of in case we lived in a town infected with a pestilential distemper. For, as in that case we should be glad, as often as we could, to walk up to some neighbouring hill, to breathe a purer air; so we must do in a spiritual manner for the health of our souls. We must go, as often as we can, to the mountain of prayer, there to converse for some time with Almighty God, and let our souls breathe a better air, than the necessity of our affairs will permit them to do at other times.

This directs us to a duty of great importance; I mean our morning and evening devotions; which ought never to be omitted, unless some indispensable business renders them impracticable; and then they may be supplied by something equivalent, if care be taken; as frequent elevations of the heart to God, or short ejaculatory prayers, of which we ought to have a constant provision; and which hinder no business.

The main point is to have a true zeal, and hearty good will: for these never want time nor opportunity to serve God, according to every one's respective state or condition: Whereas cold and slothful christians can seldom find any, even when they have more time lying upon their hands, than they know how to dispose of; and then what wonder is it, that the world should grow prevalent in their hearts, since they do nothing to hinder it from working its whole effect upon them? Whereas, a daily communication with God, by morning and evening prayer, would be a powerful counterpoise against it: Supposing withal that there be no notorious neglect in the devotions of Sundays and holidays;
which

which being days of vacation from temporal business, and set apart for God's service, afford opportunity for all sorts of spiritual exercises, that are proper to season the soul against the contagious air of the world: And 'tis incredible how much they would contribute to this end, if they were constantly employed as they ought to be, according to the intention of the Church. But if, on the contrary, they be made days of vacation from spiritual as well as temporal concerns, and consecrated to idleness, the mother of all vice, truly I cannot well imagine how persons in the world will save their souls; since by this abuse, their time is not only almost wholly divided between their business and pleasures, but God is generally most offended on those very days, on which it ought to be their principal endeavour to obtain such a stock of grace, for the rest of the week, as with the additional aid of morning and evening prayer, might suffice to strengthen them both against worldly infection, and other temptations, to which they live exposed.

The third and last sort of means to be made use of against the contagion of the world, are those I call *antidotes* or *preservatives*; of which there are two principally recommended by all directors; namely, *spiritual reading*, and the *sacraments*. As to the first, it were to be heartily wished, that not only a part of all Sundays and holidays, but at least a small half hour were daily employed in this holy exercise. The task is not great, and the advantage of it will be very considerable: *First*, because it will supply the want of public instruction, for which there is but little opportunity in our circumstances. And *secondly*, because, if performed with attention, it will also in some measure

sure supply the want of mental prayer ; which, tho' highly recommendable, is, through mistake and want of use, regarded as so difficult a thing by those who live in the world, that few apply themselves to it : Tho' St. *Francis of Sales*, in his *Introduction to a devout life*, recommends it to all Christians in general, and has set down an easy method for the successful performance of it.

But to return to my subject, and shew why I call the exercise of reading an *antidote* and *preservative* against the infection of the world : The reason is very plain ; because a constant use of it will season our souls with a doctrine directly opposite to the maxims preached up by the world ; it will instruct us in all the duties of a christian ; it will frequently put us in mind of the shortness and uncertainty of this life ; and that there is an eternity to come, in which we must be either infinitely happy or unhappy : This will wean us insensibly from the love of the world, by convincing us of the vanity of its pomps, the folly and poisons of its maxims, and the emptiness of all its pleasures : It will render sin odious, and virtue amiable ; and encourage us to the practice of it, by the example of so many saints, who are already gone before us : Finally, it will nourish the spirit of prayer, enkindle devotion, excite us to compunction, discover all the snares of the devil, and direct us how to avoid them.

And are not these most excellent preservatives against the love of the world ? Is not all this very well worth the trouble of a short half hour's reading every day ? We shall certainly find it so, and have no reason to regret the small confinement it will oblige us to. Even all religious orders, though separated from the world, are,

by their constitutions, obliged to this exercise; because it is an universal remedy for all spiritual distempers: It fortifies piety in those that have it, and warms those into it, that have it not: as it is manifest from the innumerable examples of those, who have owed their entire conversion even to the casual reading of some pious book, and became afterwards as eminent saints, as they had been remarkable before for the irregularity of their lives.

But the most sovereign *antidote* or *preservative* against the corruption of the world, and indeed against all sinful suggestions of our spiritual enemies, is the sacrament of the holy *Eucharist*, prepared by *Christ* himself for this end. Oh! if we took but care to prepare ourselves, with the greatest devotion we are able, for this holy banquet, what grace, what strength, would it communicate to us! since *Christ* himself has assured us, that *he who eats this bread shall live for ever*: because if he eats worthily, he has the very source of grace, and fountain of life remaining in him: And is not he sufficiently out of the reach of danger, who has *Christ* himself for a safeguard? We must therefore acknowledge, in a literal sense, what *David* spoke prophetically, *Thou hast prepared a table for me, against all who afflict me*; that is, a food to strengthen us against all the enemies of our souls; of which if we eat, without obstructing the operation of its virtue by any wilful neglect, we may then pronounce with a confident assurance, *Tho' I shall walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I shall not fear evil, because thou art with me*.

If any one asks, how often the holy *Eucharist* ought to be received? I answer, if it be received worthily, the oftener the better; if unworthily,

thily, the oftener the worse : because as worthy communions are never without fruit, and increase of spiritual strength ; so nothing hardens the heart more against the inspirations of divine grace, than unworthy communions : However, since it is to be supposed that no christian, who has any sense of his duty, will approach the blessed sacrament, wittingly and knowingly, with a conscience charged with mortal sin ; the general rule for persons living in the commerce of the world, is to communicate at least once a month, and on the most solemn feasts of the Church : For those who perform this duty seldom, defer it, for the most part either through sloth, because they will not take the pains to prepare themselves for it ; or upon the account of some sinful habit, which they will not resolve to quit : But whatever the cause may be, the consequence is very dangerous.

We see then what we must do, arm ourselves against the corruption of the world. I have proposed nothing beyond the very common duties of christian life : But these common duties, if well and constantly performed, will have a wonderful effect both on our hearts and actions ; whereas, they who neglect them, are, for the most part, sooner or later noted for some remarkable irregularity, or scandalous disorder in their lives.

We must consider, that the number of those who perish in the world is very great ; and tho' we be not allowed to judge of any one in particular, unless there be incontestible signs of his reprobation, yet 'tis undoubted truth, because *Christ* himself has declared it. But how comes it that so many perish ? For 'tis this we must chiefly consider ; that by discovering the rock upon which they have suffered shipwreck, we
may

may be cautioned to avoid it : How comes it then, I say, that so many perish in the world ? Do they want the necessary means of salvation ? Would they loose their souls, if they were careful to employ the means God's providence has furnished them with to save them ? Would God be wanting to them, if they were not wanting to themselves ? 'Tis impious to say it. The reason therefore why so many perish is, because the world is full of danger, and yet the greatest part of christians live in the same supine neglect, as if there were no danger at all.

Suppose that in a town infected with the plague, the greatest part of its inhabitants should not only expose themselves to all manner of danger without necessity, but wholly neglect all remedies prescribed in that case, would not the natural consequence of this mad proceeding be, that very great numbers would catch the infection, and die of it ? If therefore christians, who live in the midst of a corrupt world, will neither take care to keep them out of the reach of such dangers as may be avoided, nor arm themselves against those that cannot be avoided ; if *Sundays* and *holidays* be made days of idleness or pleasure, instead of devotion ; and the rest of the week be employed in temporal concerns or diversions, which draw the heart from God ; finally, if both prayer and spiritual reading, and the use of the sacrament, be almost wholly neglected, must not the same consequences as naturally follow, *viz.* that very great numbers will perish eternally, because they will not employ the ordinary means to save their souls ? It cannot naturally be otherwise ; for we cannot expect that God will assist us, unless we perform our part, by employing the means he has provided us with ; which if

we do, he will enable us to conquer the world; and triumph over all our spiritual enemies.

THE THIRTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE EMPTINESS AND VANITY OF THE WORLD.

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Eccl. i. 2.

SOME worldly good, whether real or supposed, is aimed at in all the cravings of men's passions; and there is no sin committed, but the unlawful enjoyment either of *honour, wealth, or pleasure*, is the principal incitement to it: 'Tis for these men forfeit God's grace, and damn themselves; tho' the very choicest of them are so despicable in themselves, that the word of God itself has proclaimed their emptiness and vanity. The serious consideration of this truth, will help to fortify the antidotes I have already prescribed, against the love of the world, and shall therefore be the subject of this entertainment.

All worldly Goods may be reduced under the general heads of *pleasure, greatness, esteem, and riches*: Now there are three general circumstances, which render the satisfaction they procure us *vain*, and, by consequence, worthy of contempt: 1. They are mixed; 2. Their duration is short; and 3. They usually end in everlasting sorrow.

To instance first, in the most general idol of men's passions, and which they usually pursue with the greatest eagerness, I mean *pleasures*; they either pass away quickly, and then they signify nothing, but serve only to inflame the desire they ought to have satisfied; or they stay long with us, and then they grow tedious, and we are sick of them: So that they either over-charge

charge the appetite, or leave it empty ; and the satisfaction they procure us, is sure to delude us one way or other.

Besides, we may consider pleasure either as lawful or unlawful in itself ; for take it what way you please, it has a mixture, which lessens in some measure the relish of it : If it be lawful in its particular kind, 'tis still dangerous in its general nature, as being apt to engage the heart too far in its interest ; and then what is lawful in itself, may become criminal in its excess, proportionably to the strength of our inclination to it : So that the use even of lawful pleasures is clogged and encumbered with so many restraints and precautions, as destroy a great part of the satisfaction we seek in the pursuit of them.

But if they be unlawful in their very nature, *disquiet* and *remorse* of conscience, the natural fruit of vice, is a wormwood which embitters the very sweetest draught of pleasure : Nay, the bare foresight of the punishment that is to follow, disturbs the pleasure in the very enjoyment ; and when that is over, shame and remorse, like ministers of justice, rush in upon the offender and make him pay very dear for the short-lived pleasure he has enjoyed. This is the nature of worldly pleasures ; and the few hints I have given shew plainly, that under whatever circumstance they are considered, they can yield no satisfaction, but what is mixed with disappointment and affliction of spirit.

Greatness, the second idol of the world, is in itself but an empty name ; and the power and authority annexed to it is a real burthen, which often crushes those whom it has raised : For the higher men are in their station, the fairer mark they are for envy and malice to shoot at : If
they

they discharge their trust as they ought, their life is encumbered with cares, and their condition is but an honourable slavery: If they neglect or abuse it, they are sure to be exposed; and their infamy becomes as public as their station: So that, considering the condition of men in power with an impartial eye, and weighing the burden against the advantage, we may truly say they commonly pay dear enough for their greatness; and whatever secret satisfaction it may bring with it, 'tis mixed with so great an alloy, that they who enjoy it can never be envied by any thinking man, and have but little reason to be over fond of their condition.

Esteem, the other darling of human pride, is a good full as vain, and no less mixed than the former: It consists in the favourable opinion men have of us; and is there any thing so empty and precarious, so inconsistent and capricious, as the opinion of men? They who love and esteem us to-day, will perhaps hate and despise us to-morrow: a false report, a casual indifference, a mere groundless fancy, suffices to rob us in an instant of all the esteem we have been labouring to acquire for many years.

But suppose this should not happen, what can the opinion of men avail us? For since opinion is nothing but a thought shut up within the breasts of men, 'tis wholly unknown to us, and can yield us no satisfaction; but when it is manifested by some outward token, and how little are those outward tokens to be depended upon, since they are much oftener an effect of flattery or dissimulation, than marks of a real esteem.

Add to this, that since esteem consists precisely in the favourable thoughts of judgment men have of us, it follows, that when they cease thinking

thinking of us, their esteem is, as it were, suspended all that time ; and, in reality, affects us no longer than whilst we are actually present to their thoughts : And how seldom does that happen ? Men, alas ! are too much taken up with themselves, and their own concerns, to apply themselves with any lasting attention, to consider the merit or good qualities of their neighbour : Nay, since no man is free from some defect, 'tis ten to one, that every defect shall be uppermost in their thoughts, and stifle the remembrance of all the good qualities we possess.

But let us set this favourite idol of corrupt nature in the very best light it will bear ; let us suppose the good opinion men have of us to be subject to no caprice or change ; nay, let us raise the value of it by all the considerations that most flatter our vanity, as the *quality, sound judgment, sincerity, and steadiness* of those by whom we are admired ; shall we, after all, be any thing the better for it ? No, certainly : Esteem supposes indeed some good in us, but makes no addition to it, leaving us, at best, but just where it found us ; and 'tis happy when it does so ; 'tis happy when we are no real losers by it : For if we are too sensibly affected with it, our being esteemed by men may occasion our being despicable in the eyes of God ; because the vanity of being esteemed may taint the heart ; the purity of our intentions may be corrupted by it ; we may be strongly tempted to make it our principal view ; and then it must, of course, destroy the whole intrinsic value of those very qualities or virtues for which we are esteemed. And is not that a most vain and empty thing, which, if it be not known, can yield us no satisfaction ; and if it be known,
may

may do us a real mischief; and whether it be known or not, makes us neither wiser, nor perfecter, nor better men, than we are without it?

Finally, *riches*, the most coveted of worldly goods, could never yet procure to any man a full and unmixed satisfaction: For they are neither kept without solicitude, nor lost without disquiet and vexation of mind. But suppose a man to be above the reach of ordinary accidents, suppose him in a quiet and secure possession of a plentiful fortune, daily experience is but too convincing a proof that happiness and riches are not always joined together; and that melancholy looks, uneasy hearts, and discontents are to be found in the large houses of the rich, as well as in the poorest cottage. How few are there in the world, whose content increases with their wealth; or rather, how few are there, whose riches are not the very occasion of their discontents!

Some, through an unaccountable unhappiness of temper, suffer all the inconveniencies of want in the very midst of plenty; because, tho' riches come daily flowing in upon them, they have not the hearts to enjoy them: and so they have no other share in the possession of wealth, than the bare incumbrance of it. Others again, tho' masters of a plentiful fortune, are ever uneasy, because there lives one near, who has a better estate than they; and the discontent of these is as real, as if the greater fortune of their neighbour swallowed up effectually a part of theirs: Others, in fine, are ever enlarging their desires, in proportion to the increase of their wealth; and 'tis impossible these should ever be content; because the thing that is to make them so is always in reversion. We may then conclude

clude from these few obvious instances, and the chearfulness we usually observe in persons of a middle state, that riches either occasion, or at least cure not an uneasy mind: And that, by consequence, the satisfaction they procure us, is far from being pure and unmixed.

The second circumstance, that renders the joys of this world truly vain, and worthy of contempt, is the shortness of their duration. To comprehend this well, we need but reflect, that there is not any one pleasure in this world, that can possibly last for any considerable space of time: For we may truly say, of all wordly pleasures, what *Solomon* says of riches, *that they make wings to themselves*; that is, that they are instrumental to their own destruction: Because all pleasures whatsoever, by exceeding a certain limit of time, cease to be pleasures, destroy themselves, and become a torment even to the greatest lovers of them.

'Tis true, variety of pleasures may in some measure relieve the taste, and take off some part of their tediousness. But who can pretend to pass his whole life in a continued and uninterrupted course of pleasures? Let a man study with all the art and industry imaginable to gratify his inclinations; natural indispositions on the one hand, and crossing accidents on the other, will give him frequent stops and interruptions; and by consequence his pleasures will be always considerably shorter than his life, which reflection may serve to give us a true idea of their shortness. For, alas! what is man's life? The *royal prophet* compares it to a *fading flower*, fresh in the morning, and withered before night. *St. James* calls it a *vapour*, that rises and vanishes in a moment. And yet this fading flower, this momentary vapour is of
much

much longer duration, than the pleasures of this world can possibly be, in reference to any particular person.

For, in the first place, man's infancy is a part of life altogether incapable of pleasure. The same may be also said of his decrepid years: which the scripture calls a time of *labour* and *sorrow*, and is commonly termed a second childhood; but with this unhappy difference, that it has a perfect sense of all its miseries: So that whereas the whole course of man's life is commonly divided into four parts, to wit, his childhood, youth, middle and old age; two of the four are almost wholly incapable of pleasure. His first years pass in a total ignorance of what pleasure is, and his latter years are most made up of crosses and sufferings. If he dies soon, the shortness of his life permits him not to enjoy the world; and if he lives long, life itself becomes a burden to him: So that you see the very longest course of pleasures a man can propose to himself, is already shorter than his life, by a considerable number of years.

Now as to his youth and middle age, the two parts of man's life, which alone are capable of pleasure; we must also allow for the many gaps, and make such large abatements, as will reduce the duration of his pleasures to a very narrow compass of time. Little less than one full third is commonly allowed for sleep; during which the poorest beggar is as happy as the happiest monarch in the world; or, to speak more properly, the greatest voluptuary laid on a bed of down, has no more pleasure than the beggar in his barn: For sleep is the image of death, in which all conditions are alike; or rather we are as if we were not, being under a total suspension both of pain and pleasure.

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But if to this long vacancy of pleasure, which nature daily challenges, we add all casual indispositions, and a thousand accidents, to which man's life is exposed; we shall find the necessary abatements to be allowed for stops and interruptions, even in the smoothest course of pleasures, will run away with so large a portion, even of that part of life which alone is capable of them; that how short soever a man's life is in itself, the duration of his pleasures, tho' pursued with all the art and application imaginable, will not amount, in the whole, to a third part of it.

It was upon the experimental knowledge of these truths, *Solomon* grounded that solemn declaration transmitted to us in holy writ, of the *vanity* of all earthly things: and truly, if a man was ever qualified to be a judge in any case, *Solomon* is one above all exception, in the point in question. He mounted his father's throne, when he was very young, and possessed it to a great age: All which time passed in an uninterrupted course of the greatest prosperity. Nothing was in appearance wanting to make him not only the greatest prince, but happiest man in the world. He was both beloved and feared by his own subjects, and respected far and near as an oracle of wisdom.

Riches came flowing to him in such abundance, that during his reign, silver was no more valued than heaps of stone; and as money commands all things, so it furnished him with all the variety of pleasures his wit could invent, or passions incline him to; which he never denied any thing, but studied to indulge and gratify in all they could desire, as he writes of himself. Nor do we read that any considerable affliction or cross accident happened to him in the whole course

course of his reign: Yet notwithstanding all this, he was so far from being satisfied with the world, that the long experience he had of its prosperity, served only to convince him of its emptiness, and oblige him to proclaim to all mankind, that all its enjoyments are but *vanity and affliction of spirit*. Good God! What a poor wretched thing is this world; since with all its store of *wealth, greatness, esteem, and pleasures*, it cannot so much as make one single man happy!

However, there remains one circumstance more, which renders all earthly joys, not only worthy of contempt, but even of our hatred and aversion, to wit, that *they usually end in everlasting sorrow*. Our Saviour has delivered this truth in these express terms, *Woe be to you that laugh now, for ye shall weep*: And in the parable or relation of the different ends of *Dives* and *Lazarus*, one reason expressly alleged why the one was damned, and the other saved, is because the rich glutton had enjoyed the pleasures of this life, and *Lazarus* had suffered great afflictions. *My son* (says *Abraham* to *Dives*) *remember that thou in thy life-time didst receive good things, and Lazarus evil things: But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented*: So that the pleasures of this world, if the heart be set upon them, are but the seeds of everlasting torments: And as they *who sow in tears* have God's promise that they shall one day *reap in joy*; so they who now *sow in joy*, that is, pursue the pleasures of this world with an immoderate love, can expect no better fate, than to *reap* hereafter *in tears and sorrow*.

It was the consideration of this truth, kept the royal prophet steady in his belief of an all-ruling Providence, when, as he declares, his

faith was ready to stagger at the prosperity of sinners, and the sufferings of the just: For he no sooner considered their different ends, *viz.* the joys that crown the suffering of the just, and the endless miseries that follow the short joys of the wicked, but his disturbed thoughts were immediately calmed, and all his doubts of God's providence fully satisfied.

However, we must not infer from thence, that temporal goods are not God's blessings, or that we ought not to be thankful for them: They are certainly his blessings, and challenge a return of gratitude: But they are a sort of blessings, which our corrupt nature makes always dangerous, and, for the most part, fatal to our souls: *First*, because they are apt to swell us with pride, and a vain conceit of ourselves: *Secondly*, because finding them agreeable, we easily set our hearts upon them, and even love them with a preference to our eternal good: And, *Thirdly*, because we usually make them the instruments of our passions, and instead of employing them to God's greater honour and glory, we use them as means to procure to ourselves those unlawful pleasures, which the divine justice is obliged to punish hereafter.

For these reasons, which are but too well grounded upon daily experience, and the common practice of mankind, our Saviour pronounced this terrible sentence, *that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* The same reasons drew also from him, those heavy woes against the rich, which one would think should suffice to hinder any man from desiring or envying their condition. Not that the bare possession of riches, renders us in any manner criminal in the sight of God: Nay, if we will,

will, we may make them very instrumental to our future happiness ; particularly by distributing liberal alms amongst the poor, by employing them for the comfort of the afflicted, and Finally, by making them a support of the cause and interest of religion. But this good management is so little practised in the world, and the abuse of them flows so naturally from our inbred corruption, that very few make them serve for any other purpose, than to purchase for themselves those vain joys which corrupt the heart, and terminate of course in everlasting sorrow. Whence it follows, that those who have wealth, ought daily to pray God to give him grace to use it well ; and those who have it not, have reason to praise him for being out of the reach of a temptation, by which thousands have perished.

THE THIRTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

SOME PRACTICAL INFERENCES DRAWN FROM THE FOREGOING TRUTH.

What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Mark viii. 36.

HAVING in my last discourse laid before you the emptiness and vanity of worldly goods, it remains now to improve this truth, by drawing some practical consequences from it ; which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

From the two first circumstances of earthly goods, it plainly follows, that it is a great folly to set our hearts upon any thing in this world. For who but a fool would engage his affections, where he is sure to meet with disappointments?

And what can we else expect from things made up of a greater mixture of evil than good, and which therefore must of course give greater vexation than content?

If we ever yet had heard of any man, who owned himself perfectly satisfied in the enjoyment of this world, we should have some encouragement to hope the same. But since even those, who in all appearance were as happy as the world could make them, have ever acknowledged their dissatisfaction, and the want of something to fill up the measure of the imaginary happiness they proposed to themselves; is it not an extravagance and folly, either to promise ourselves what no man before us ever could arrive at, or set our hearts upon things, which we know before-hand will deceive us? For since content is the only end we pursue, in all our desires of worldly enjoyments; if it be evident, that they are not able to secure this to us, there appears nothing in them worth the engaging our affections; and to set our hearts upon them is to act without sense or reason.

However, let us now suppose the joys of this world could give us a perfect content, at least whilst they lasted: this notwithstanding would not excuse us from being guilty of folly, in setting our hearts upon them, by reason of the shortness of their duration, and the unavoidable necessity of their ending at last in death: The reason is, because it is certainly a folly to create to ourselves an unnecessary grief and trouble. Now this is the infallible consequence of setting our hearts upon any thing, that will be some time or other taken from us: For whatsoever we love and enjoy with delight, we always lose with regret; and the greatness of our pleasure in the

the possession, is the measure of our grief in the loss.

Whence it is, that they who have their hearts disengaged, enjoy a perfect peace, which neither losses nor disappointments can destroy : Nay, in relation to these, death itself loses its sting ; whereas it has a double one to those, whose hearts are fast linked to the world ; and their separation from it is like tearing off a limb : So that to cherish an inordinate love to any thing, is, in effect, to take a delight in working out the chains that are to load us, and preparing the instruments that are to torment us. *O death* (says the wise man) *how bitter is thy remembrance to a man, who places his repose in the enjoyment of his wealth !* And 'truly, 'tis no wonder that death should be to such a one a most bitter cup, whether he looks back upon what he is to part with, or forward upon what is to be his future lot ; which to a lover of this world can be nothing else but a state of everlasting sorrow.

However, it does not follow hence, but that every one is bound to use a reasonable care in the management of his temporal concerns : And in many causes he is bound to it, not only by the rules of prudence, but by the law of justice. As for instance, a person to whom an estate comes by inheritance, seems to be under a natural obligation of justice, to endeavour, as far as in him lies, to leave it to his next heir as good as he found it ; because his heir seems to have the same title to the reversion, as he has to the possession of it for life : and therefore parents in this case, ought to look upon themselves as trustees and guardians of their children before God ; to whom they will be certainly accountable for their administration. But there is another

ther consideration of no less weight to induce them to it: For 'tis a thing of the greatest importance, to keep up a family; to which great numbers by the disposition of God's providence are owing for their daily bread, and which is as a common refuge and sanctuary to all the persecuted and distressed, who must all be ruined of course with the ruin of the family, by which they are supported.

Now, since the very best estate may either moulder away by neglect, or be ruined by extravagance; it follows, that a reasonable care and attention is necessary for the preservation of it: And tho' this concern takes up a great part of a man's thoughts, it is not what, in scripture language, is called *the love of riches*, or what I call *the setting our hearts upon them*; because it is consistent with a true christian contempt of them, which excludes not a moderate concern, but an immoderate affection for them: So that if, in a time of trial, a person is ready to sacrifice all for God's cause, rather than offend him mortally; 'tis a manifest proof, that tho' his riches have a part in his thoughts, God Almighty has the first place in his heart.

It follows, *secondly*, that what has been said against the love of earthly things, hinders us not from cherishing certain inclinations impressed by nature, and conformable to the order of Providence; such as the love of parents for their children, and the mutual love of married persons: These inclinations, tho' attended with a tenderness, which seems to be a strong bias upon the heart, are not only lawful, but necessary; for parents are bound to love their children, and persons engaged in the bonds of wedlock are bound to love each other; and the tenderness which naturally attends it, is but a stronger

stronger cement, intended by the author of nature to render it more firm and lasting, and make the many indispensable duties annexed to their state fall in agreeably with their inclinations.

However, this love has also its bounds; for though the parents be allowed to have a tenderness for their children, and married persons to love each other above any thing in this world, yet their love must take care to stop there; for if it goes farther, it becomes inordinate; because the love of God admits neither of a superior nor rival: So that if any thing pretends to dispute the place with him, or preference to him, 'tis manifest that, in this case, our very tenderest inclinations must be sacrificed to our duty. 'Tis true, the heart is divided in the case supposed, as St. Paul teaches in these words. *He who is married, is solicitous for the things of this world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided,* 1 Cor. vii. 33. But the division is far from being equal: God has always a sovereign right over the whole heart; and whatever share is allowed to husband, wife, children, or any other thing of this world, 'tis no more than a subordinate or relative love, limited by the law of God, and bound to pay an entire obedience to all his orders.

I come now to my second inference, which I draw from the third circumstance of earthly joys, *viz. their ending in everlasting sorrow*; and conclude from it, that those, whose narrow circumstances exclude them from enjoying the pleasure of the world, or even oblige them to earn their bread with hard labour; have no reason to repine, as they usually do, at their condition: For if we judge of things by the principles of faith, we shall find their complaints and mur-

murs.

murs as unreasonable as the outcries of madmen, who are angry at their keepers for taking away from them, the things wherewith they would destroy themselves. I own, If there were no other world to be looked for, their circumstances would be very hard ; but since this life is but a passage to a better one to come, that condition ought to be esteemed the best, which is the safest way to it : For what traveller would not prefer a safe road, before a pleasant one, beset with many and almost unavoidable dangers ?

Now this is a faithful representation of the two different states of the poor and rich : The way of the rich is pleasant and diverting, but full of snares and temptations : and the great numbers of those that perish in it, is a clear proof, that very few are either watchful enough to avoid the one, or have virtue enough to resist the other. *They who will become rich, says St. Paul, fall into temptations, and the snares of the devil ; and into many unprofitable and hurtful lusts, which sink men into destruction and perdition.* The poor, are on the contrary, in a rough and unpleasant way, and their condition exposes them to many hardships. But their suffering is their security ; it preserves them from the love of the world ; it keeps them in an humble disposition ; it puts them under a happy necessity of doing penance for their sins ; finally, it removes from them the means and opportunities of gratifying their natural passions : All which are very great advantages, and serve as fences to keep danger at a distance, and secure their passage to a better life : So that the poor, whatever hardships they endure, have but little reason to complain of their condition ; since the ground of all their discontents and murmurs seems to be no other, than

than that God has taken care to remove the greatest obstacles of salvation out of their way, and to have put it in a great measure out of their power to lose themselves for ever.

I know these reasons make but little impression upon men that are worldly given; because, being strongly affected with what is present, and looking upon the life to come as a thing at a great distance, they are willing to let the other world take its chance, so they may but enjoy themselves in this: They are sufficiently persuaded, that a life of hardship is the safest way to Heaven; but, being a painful one, they would rather be at their ease in the broad way, let the end of it be what it may, than to work and drudge on for salvation. But, O good God! what a strange infatuation is this! What a blindness, to prefer the short pleasures of a perishable life, before eternal and inestimable joys! Nay to purchase them with endless and unspeakable torments! Most certainly either they are mad, or *Christ* was mistaken in telling us, *That it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul*: For truly, the whole world imports a great deal, at least far more than any single man could ever make himself master of: Nay, the largest kingdom or empire in it, is but a small part, if compared with the whole.

Suppose then, that any one single man should become absolute master of all the wealthy kingdoms, states, and empires it contains, would all this profit him nothing, if he should lose his soul? No, nothing at all: Nay, he would lose infinitely by it: The reason is, because the world, with all its greatness, wealth, pomp, and pleasures, must have an end; but the loss of the soul is eternal and irreparable: And

what can it profit a man to purchase pleasures, which must certainly end, with the loss of joys that will never end? What can it profit him, to have enjoyed the world for a certain number of years, and when this term of time is expired, to pass to everlasting torments? Suppose a man had lived in an uninterrupted course of pleasures, from the creation of the world to this very day, and that the fatal moment were now come to bid an everlasting farewell to all those pleasures, and begin an unhappy eternity! Alas! what would the past enjoyments of pleasures avail him? What would it profit him to have lived great; to have had the world at command; to have indulged his senses with every thing he could desire; if, after all, he must not only see the end of all this temporal felicity, but pass from it to a state of endless misery and torments? 'Tis certain, his condition would be no better, in reference to the time past, than if his whole life had passed in a dream: Nay, the remembrance of past pleasures would rather aggravate than mitigate his misfortune.

Whence it appears, how senseless men are, to hazard their salvation for the enjoyment only of such pleasures, as the narrow compass of a private fortune will afford them: For if the gaining even of the world, with all its riches, pomps, and pleasures, be no manner of equivalent or compensation for the loss of their souls, what madness is it then to throw away this precious treasure for so small and inconsiderable a part of it, as bears no manner of proportion to the whole?

Hence also we may gather, how much they are to be lamented, who, to gratify some one single passion, forfeit all their title to eternal happiness. The case I speak of is theirs, who,
having

having otherwise a sense of God and religion, are however, through natural temper and custom, enslaved to some one particular vice, and have no other impediment to obstruct their way to salvation. Now, since even those are pronounced unhappy, who should lose their souls to gain the whole world; how deplorable then is their case, who lose their souls, not for a full enjoyment of all the pleasures the whole world can afford, but for the miserable satisfaction of gratifying every now and then that single inclination, which tyrannizes over them? And even that too with such after-gripes and remorse of a troubled conscience, as utterly destroy those very pleasures, for which they expose themselves to everlasting torments? Alas! poor wretches! they make themselves eternally miserable in the life to come, and they cease not to be unhappy in this world: They lose Heaven, and get in a manner nothing for it; for whoever continues a slave to any one passion, renounces his claim to future happiness, as effectually as if he laboured under all the deadly sins; and Heaven is equally lost, whether one parts with it for a single farthing, or for a thousand millions; whether a kingdom or a cup of drink, be received in exchange for it.

Whoever therefore is in this condition, let him consider the unhappy circumstances of his state, and the wrong he does himself; let him consider, whether the pleasure he takes in committing that sin, to which he is inclined, be worth the losing his soul for ever? Whether the satisfaction it affords him, be a recompence for the loss of Heaven? Finally, whether it can make him any tolerable amends, for the endless and irreparable evils it draws upon him: Alas! how infinitely disproportioned is it either to the
happiness

happiness it deprives him of, or the miseries it betrays him to!

Suppose an hour's pleasure were offered us, upon condition, that the next hour we should endure the rack, would we be willing to hearken to such a proposal? I dare confidently say, if pleasures were not to be purchased, but upon these terms, we should find but few pretenders to them; and yet the pain and pleasure, in the case supposed, would have a proportion both in their quality and duration: Whereas, no time, tho' ever so long, can be compared to eternity; nor can the pleasures of this life bear any proportion to the torments of the life to come: What madness is it then to make the one the price of the other?

But to return once more to the poor, who are chiefly concerned in the consequence of this reflection, their circumstances are such, that, do what they can, they can never promise themselves any great share in the pleasures of this life; for they can never hope to become either rich or great, nor by consequence capable of enjoying the world in any considerable degree: And suppose they had it in their power to make themselves both rich and great, with the loss of their souls, it would be nothing less than a desperate madness to do it, as I have clearly shewn. But since God's providence has so ordered things for them, as to put them out of the reach of this temptation; since he has been pleased to confine them within such narrow circumstances, as oblige them to earn their bread with the sweat of their brows; in a word, since they have no prospect before them of any better condition than that of a painful and laborious life; what is there in this world, as it regards persons under these

these circumstances, should tempt them to lose their souls?

It is true, they may have the pleasure of curling and swearing; they may perhaps afford to be drunk sometimes; they may murmur against God; they may please themselves with defaming their neighbour, or revenging themselves as well as they can of their enemies; but is it not a lamentable case, to damn their souls for some such despicable and wretched satisfaction? Is it not a deplorable thing to renounce their claim to Heaven, for the very dregs and outcasts of sinful pleasures; wherewith, when they have now gratified corrupt nature to the very utmost of their power, they are still poor, and ever like to be so? They must still drudge on, and gain their living with hard toil and labour: So that by continuing under any of those habits of cursing, swearing, detracting, drinking, or the like, what do they else but lose the fruits of their necessary suffering in this life, and render themselves liable to everlasting torments hereafter? They cannot but be sufferers in this world; but if they will but make a right use of their sufferings, they may be infinitely happy in the next: Whereas, by their impatience, and neglecting to serve God as they ought, according to their state, they take the direct course to pass from the sufferings of the one, to the torments of the other.

But to conclude; I say once more, whatever a man's circumstances are in this world, tho' he be in a condition to enjoy all its pleasures, he is infinitely miserable if he loses his soul; because it is not only the loss of an infinite good, joined with unspeakable torments, but 'tis a loss that can never be repaired.

THE

THE THIRTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE HAPPINESS THAT ATTENDS A VIRTUOUS LIFE.

A good conscience is a continual feast. Prov. XV. 15.

THO' sin ought to be detested chiefly, because it is an offence to God, yet there are many other inferior motives to induce us to it; and all sorts of weapons may lawfully be made use of against the enemy of God and our souls. If love alone be too weak to keep us from being overcome by it, the fear both of present and future evils, or any other rational motive, whether it regards our present ease, or future happiness, may be called in to our assistance: The terror of God's judgments have prepared the way for the conversion of many enormous sinners; and the uneasiness of a galled and fretted conscience, has forced many more to seek that solid comfort in the practice of virtue, of which they always found themselves disappointed in the pursuit of unlawful pleasures.

This then is the consideration I shall at present lay before you, to excite you to a hatred of sin, and the practice of virtue: I mean, the happiness it procures us even in this world. I shall endeavour to convince you, that there is no true happiness upon earth, but what is grounded upon the testimony of a good conscience, and the practice of an innocent and virtuous life; that a christian, truly virtuous, cannot but be truly happy; And finally, that neither the pleasures of this world can give ease to a bad conscience, nor its sufferings trouble the repose of a good one. This I shall endeavour to make out in two discourses by shewing, *First,*
that

that nothing renders man's life so comfortable in itself as the practice of solid virtue, shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

Among the many arguments, the royal prophet makes use of to encourage us to the love of virtue, there is scarce any he insists more frequently upon, or sets off with greater eloquence, than the sweetness and many comforts himself had experienced in practice of it. *How great, O Lord,* says he (Psalm xxx.) *is the multitude of thy sweetness, which thou hast hid for them that love thee! The commandments of the Lord,* (says the same prophet) *are just, rejoicing the heart. They are more to be desired than gold; sweeter also than honey, or honey-comb.* And again, in the 118th Psalm, he expresses the delight he had in the observance of them. *I have been delighted* (says he) *in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches: I have loved thy commandments above gold, and precious stones.* But lest we should be unwilling to depend upon his bare testimony, in 33d Psalm, he invites all to *taste and see how sweet the Lord is.* And truly, though the authority of this holy prophet suffices to convince our speculative judgment, nothing but an experimental knowledge can give us a feeling sense of this truth. 'Tis only *seeing and tasting* can give us a true idea of the heavenly comforts God bestows upon his faithful servants in this life.

For such is the goodness of our most bountiful Lord, that not content to reward virtue in the life to come, he is pleased to give us even in this vale of tears, some antipasts of the incomprehensible joys, which are the everlasting portion of the saints in Heaven. His fatherly tenderness will not suffer him to let us live in bare hopes of future joys, without providing
also.

also in some measure for our present happiness. For he knows we are travellers in this life, and in danger of fainting on the way, without the help of some refreshments to keep up our spirits. And therefore lest our natural sloth should make our journey to Heaven seem over painful to us, he has so twisted together our happiness and our duty, that as it is impossible to be truly happy without doing our duty, so it is no less impossible to do our duty without being truly happy. *Who, says holy Job, ever resisted God, and had peace?* And we may ask as confidently, *Who ever obeyed God, and had not peace?* That peace, I say, which (as *St. Paul* tells us) *surpasses all human sense*, and makes the soul enjoy a kind of Heaven upon earth. For 'tis certain this hidden treasure is only to be found in the practice of a virtuous life, and is wholly inconsistent with a conscience labouring under the guilt of mortal sin.

St. Austin, who first experienced the uneasiness of a conscience burdened with sin, and afterwards the sweetness of a holy life, is the best judge in this case. This holy saint had many years together truckled under the tyranny of his passions: But God Almighty being *mercifully severe* to him, as he himself expresses it, would not let him enjoy one moment's true content in that unhappy state: but was incessantly calling upon him by the inward murmurs, uneasiness, and reproaches of a disturbed conscience. However, as nothing is more apt to increase the violence of a passion, or rivet it more deeply in the soul than often yielding to it, his inclination to carnal pleasures became at length so prevalent, and gained so absolute a power over him, that he even grew in love with his slavery, and was afraid to be delivered from his chains, tho' they

they galled and tortured him without intermission.

But as soon as God's grace had wrought a thorough change in his heart, and rescued him from the powerful charm, that had held him so long captive, Oh, then he spoke another language: Virtue then appeared no longer the frightful thing he had formerly imagined it to be: The state of continency, which before seemed full of insuperable difficulties, and inconsistent with all comfort of life, became so sweet and charming, that it gave him a disgust of all his former pleasures: as himself acknowledges to God in these pious words, *O my God, my helper and redeemer, how delightful it became all on a sudden to be deprived of these pleasures, which before I courted with so much passion! I then renounced with joy, what formerly I feared to lose. For thou, O Lord, didst cast them out from me. Thou, who art the only true and sovereign sweetness, thou didst cast them out from me, and thou enteredst into their place: thou, I say, who art sweet above all pleasure.*

No doubt but he is so to all that love and serve him with their whole hearts. His blessed sight completes our happiness in Heaven, and his presence to our souls by grace, begins here on earth. He is our crown at the end of our race, and our comfort and refreshment during the toils and labours of it. The tenderness Almighty God has for his children is so great, that he thinks every thing but himself, is too little to make them happy in this world: And since their love of him, tho' not yet purified from all mixture of earthly alloy, is of the same nature with that of the saints above; his will is, that their reward shall also bear some resemblance with theirs, and be at least some small

small drops of that full torrent of delights, which is reserved for the life to come. So that what is said of heavenly joys, *That the eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, what God has prepared for those that love him*; is, in some measure, applicable to the inward joy, content, peace of mind, which is the usual reward of virtue in this life. For what a joy and comfort must it needs be to a christian, to bear within himself the testimony of a good conscience; which, in the words of my text, is called a *continual feast*! Being always attended with a firm confidence, in the favour and protection of Almighty God in this life, and the hopes of a joyful eternity hereafter. This doubtless is a happiness which truly deserves our esteem and value; a happiness which surpasses all the pleasures of this world: Finally, a happiness, which nothing but a virtuous life can effectually procure us.

But if we search into the original cause of this interior comfort of a soul in grace, I can discover no other than what is expressed in this celebrated sentence of St. Austin, *Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thy own self; and our hearts are restless till they repose in thee*. For since all created things have a natural tendency to the end for which they are created, and are under a kind of constraint and violence, whilst they are withheld or diverted from pursuing that end; it follows, that the soul of man, being created to enjoy Almighty God, cannot but have, as it were, a natural propensity and tendency towards him, and must needs be restless and dissatisfied, till she be united to him.

It is true indeed, as long as she is confined to the body, she cannot attain to that perfect union, which alone can satisfy her boundless desires, and render her completely happy. However,

ever, though she cannot now attain to this perfect union, as being the proper blessing of the life to come, and the ultimate end of her creation; yet there is one of a lower degree, whereof she is capable in the interim, and which is absolutely necessary to fit her for the other. The union I speak of is that which is now made by *grace*, and will hereafter be perfected by *glory*. And tho' this union by grace be of a degree much inferior to the other, yet being proportioned to her present state, and the only one she is now capable of, it cannot but give her a true and solid content; since by virtue of it, the soul is not only fitted for that perfect and everlasting fruition of Almighty God, which is her ultimate felicity, and the full accomplishment of all her desires, but she is likewise put into an actual possession of him; because to be united to God by grace, is really to possess him as much as we are capable of in this life.

And tho' this possession of him cannot fully satiate the boundless appetite of the soul, nor fix her in a perfect rest and acquiescence, because it leaves her still in a longing desire of, and farther tendency to a much more perfect fruition of him; it contents at least in such a degree, as the imperfection of her state will admit. 'Tis of the nature of an antipast, which stays the stomach though it fills not: 'Tis as a cordial which keeps up her fainting spirits, and enables her to walk on chearfully to the desired end of her painful pilgrimage: It delivers her not indeed from all concern, apprehensions and fears; nor is it expedient it should, because our state requires that we should *work out our salvation in fear and trembling*; but it balances them with an equal counterpoise of hope, so as to keep her from sinking under her fears:
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It moderates their excess, and frees her in a great measure from the anxious and uneasy part of them: In a word it renders the soul as happy as her condition, under the confinement of a sinful and corruptible body, will permit.

But, as our being created to enjoy Almighty God, is the true reason of the solid comfort the soul has in being now united to him by grace; so is it also the reason, why nothing, without him, can yield us any true content; and why our hearts are always restless, uneasy, and dissatisfied with whatever this world can afford, if Almighty God be not found in it: For how is it possible a soul, created to enjoy an infinite good, should rest satisfied with mere shadows of felicity! How is it possible but she must be under a continual restlessness and agitation, until he, in whom all true happiness centers, has fixed her upon a solid foundation! No, christians; since it is the goodness of God to create us for himself, he has taken care to frame our nature so, that nothing but himself shall ever make us happy: And do we not find by experience, that after the practice of any mortification for the love of God, or the faithful performance of the duties of a christian life, we rest infinitely more content and satisfied at heart, than when we have made it our whole business and study to gratify our inclinations? Nay, do we do not find, that whatever pleasure this world procures us, though ever so exquisite or artfully contrived, it never yields a lasting satisfaction, but vanishes like a vapour, and leaves the soul as void and empty as it found her?

And what can be the reason hereof; but because the practice of virtue is a means to unite us to God; and the pleasures of this world remove

move us at a distance from him? Whence, the soul being conscious to herself, that earthly delights are so far from promoting her true happiness, that they are a real obstacle to it, she cannot possibly find a solid comfort in them. 'Tis true, the pleasures of this world may gratify the senses, but can never content the heart; they may serve for a sort of pleasing amusement, but can never afford a lasting satisfaction; nay, what is more, they generally cloy and surfeit even those that are the fondest of them; and when they are gone off, seldom fail to leave a heavy heart behind.

And therefore, the Holy Ghost, by the pen of the wise man, represents the damned in hell venting their despair, and condemning their past criminal pleasures in these remarkable words: *We have been wearied in the ways of iniquity and perdition, and we have walked hard ways:* Whence it appears, that how pleasing soever the broad way that leads to hell, may appear to flesh and blood, it wants not its thorns, which often wound the heart in its most sensible part, and render it very uneasy under the gayest outside; whereas the practice of virtue, though hard and difficult in appearance, is sweet and comfortable in the bottom, and always attended with true joy, content, and satisfaction.

Virtue, indeed, like bitter draughts, is somewhat disrelishing to sense; but brings always with it health and soundness to the mind: It begins sometimes in *tears*, but always ends in *joy*. There is indeed some pain and trouble to be undergone in sowing the first seeds of virtue, and wedding out our sinful inclinations; but this small trouble is afterwards rewarded with a plentiful harvest of solid comfort. The purifying of the soul from all its peccant humours,

as well as that of the body, cannot but be attended with some trouble and inconvenience; but the pleasure of health, that follows it, is an abundant compensation for the one as well as the other.

Oh! can there be a greater satisfaction to a christian, than, when the day is over, to sit down with the testimony of a good conscience, and this heart comforting thought; I have done nothing to-day wherewith my conscience can reproach me: I have performed all my duties; I resisted this temptation; I avoided that occasion of sin; I mastered my passion, when I was so and so provoked! Such a consciousness affords a comfort, that surpasses all the pleasures of this world; fixes the soul in a true christian peace; and prepares her for the everlasting repose of the saints in Heaven.

THE FORTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

VIRTUE SWEETENS ALL THE SUFFERINGS OF
HUMAN LIFE.

My yoke is sweet and my burden light. Matt.
xi. 30.

OUR Saviour calls the evangelical law a *yoke*, and a burden, because the observance of it is painful to corrupt nature, considered as such: For corrupt nature loves ease, liberty, and pleasures; but the evangelical law recommends labour, watchfulness, and penance: Corrupt nature inclines us to pride; but the evangelical law pronounces it to be a mortal poison to the soul: Finally, corrupt nature is the source of an inordinate love, by which it seeks itself in every thing; but the evangelical law commands us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow

follow *Christ*. And how then can the yoke of *Christ* be called *sweet*, and *his burden light*? Since it is so contrary to all the inclinations that are born with us.

But we may as well ask, how can that meat be good and savory in itself, which is not relished by a depraved palate; or at which a foul stomach nauseates? For as in this case, the fault is not in the meat, but in the stomach, so it is in the duties commanded by the gospel. If they be disrelishing, if they seem a grievance to nature, it is our corruption makes them so: The palate of the soul is deprived by some vicious inclinations, and therefore cannot taste the sweetness of a virtuous life; whereas pious christians, who by subduing their passions have raised themselves above flesh and blood, find a solid comfort in the practice of it, as I have clearly proved in my former discourse: wherein I shewed, that nothing renders man's life so comfortable in itself as the practice of virtue: and tho' this alone be a convincing proof of this sacred truth, *viz. that the yoke of Christ is sweet, and his burden light*. I shall now proceed to shew further, that this yoke is not only sweet in itself, but that it even sweetens all the necessary sufferings of human life; which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

St. *Austin* compares the yoke of *Christ* to the wings of birds; which are a weight indeed, but such as bear them up: *Take away*, says he, *this weight, and they cannot fly; let them have it and they can fly; Such is the yoke of Christ: It is carried by us, and it carries us*. So that whereas other burdens press us down, the yoke of *Christ* is of a quite different nature: 'Tis a burden that raises those who carry it from the earth; it bears them up, and keeps them from sinking,
under

under the many pressures and incumbrances of this life. Which similitude suits very well with these comfortable words of our Saviour; *Come all to me that are oppressed, and I will refresh you; for my yoke is sweet, and my burden light.* As if one should say; fear not that I should lay heavy burdens on you; I invite you indeed to come and put on my yoke; but it is to ease and comfort, not to gall or fret you.

'Tis true, the privilege of virtue consists not in exempting men from suffering. Oh no! The disciples of the cross must not pretend to be exempt from crosses; since their lord and master has walked before them carrying his cross: Nay, I stick not to own, that (setting aside those evils, which are the natural attendants of sin) the crosses of the just in this life are generally more numerous, and even heavier in themselves, than those of the wicked; as being the peculiar portion of the just in this life, and the surest pledges of God's love and favour: But there is this great difference between the crosses of the just, and those of the wicked; that whereas these are destitute of all solid comfort in their crosses, the just have, on the contrary, both many helps to alleviate, and comforts to sweeten theirs.

The first of these, and basis of all the rest, is the strengthening grace of *Jesus Christ*; which, as it is bestowed in greater abundance on the just in this life, so it gives them this advantage over the wicked, that they are more powerfully succoured in the carrying of their crosses: For 'tis by means of this supernatural help, that God makes good his promise of *being always with them in tribulation*; and that in such a manner, as to be present to them, not only as a witness or spectator to encourage them, but as a partner

partner with them, and assistant to them in their labours: If a violent temptation assaults them, his grace comes in to their aid, and makes the temptation itself turn to the advantage of their souls: If the world rises against them, or persecutions threaten them, God is their strength and comfort: his grace inspires them with resolution, and they can truly glory with the Psalmist, *The Lord is my helper: I will not fear what men shall do to me*: Finally, whatever cross befall them, though too heavy for nature to bear, God's grace is all-sufficient to keep them from sinking under it.

So that every virtuous christian may say with St. Paul, *not I, but God's grace with me*: And 'tis with reference to this divine assistance we may apply the words of *Isaiah*, *The yoke shall be destroyed; because of the anointing*; that is, the interior unction of divine grace shall so strengthen their souls, that the pressures and afflictions, which would be an intolerable burthen without it, shall become light and easy with it: For, 'tis proportionably with the soul as with the body; and as the same weight, which would bear down and overcome a weakly body, will perhaps be nothing to one that has his full strength; so the same crosses, which with their weight, would oppress a soul destitute of the superabundant grace St. Paul speaks of, shall be cheerfully carried by those who are strengthened with this supernatural unction.

It was this gave St. Paul the confidence to boast, *That he could do all things in him, who comforted him*; which, in effect, was not glorying in his own strength, but magnifying the power and efficacy of God's grace; which, working in and with his creatures, renders every thing, tho' ever so contrary to nature, or

above its strength, not only possible, but easy : For which reason St. *Austin* prayed thus to Almighty God ; *Give, O Lord, what thou commandest, and command whatever thou pleasest* : As if one should say ; lend but thy helping hand, enable me with thy powerful grace, and then command me to do or suffer any thing, tho' ever so difficult or painful in itself : Because he knew, that as nothing was either impossible or difficult to God's holy grace, so it rendered all things even easy, to such as are favoured with this heavenly blessing.

But, besides this peculiar advantage of virtuous christians, there is another which makes the bitter cup of afflictions go down, not only with ease, but even with delight and pleasure : I mean the *love of God*, which is predominant in the hearts of the just, and increases by the same degrees as grace makes its progress in their souls. Now experience tells us, what power love has over the heart, and how it sweetens every thing, tho' ever so repugnant to nature : So that those very things, which without love are disagreeable and painful, become pleasing and delightful with it : This appears plainly in natural love ; as that between friend and friend, parents and children, husband and wife : Do we not find that fourteen years of hard service seemed but as a few days to *Jacob*, because he had a tender love for *Rachel*, who was to be the reward of his service ? Which made St. *Austin* say, that whereas every thing is painful to one that is cold or indifferent ; love alone takes away all difficulties, and feels no pain or trouble. *Qui amat non laborat.*

If then mere natural love has such a powerful charm, as to render all things easy, can we attribute

attribute less to the love of God, when it has full possession of the heart; or wonder it should sweeten the most bitter cup of afflictions? The love of God, I say, which has nothing less than infinite goodness and beauty for its object; and must therefore affect the heart more powerfully than any other love, as its object is more transcendently excellent and charming than any created object: For if men can, for the sake of persons they love, take delight in things that are otherwise painful to nature, what wonder is it that they who love God with their whole hearts, should find their joy in suffering for his sake? Especially when they consider, that nothing happens without his appointment or permission; and that whatever happens to them, is designed by him to render them hereafter more happy, in the everlasting fruition of the object they love and desire.

I know 'tis usually objected, that our ideas of spiritual things, being weak and obscure, cannot by consequence make such lively impressions upon a sensitive nature, as those of material objects, which are conveyed to us by the ministry and evidence of our senses: But though something of this may be allowed, yet if we consider that the peculiar effect of grace, where it abounds, is to raise the soul in some measure above the impressions of flesh and blood, and that what is wanting of evidence to the revealed truths of faith, is abundantly supplied by their infallible certainty; we shall have no difficulty to conceive, that though God be invisible to our corporal eyes, the love of him, as known by a strong and lively faith, may inflame the soul more ardently, and work more powerfully upon the heart, than the most charming objects of our senses.

Nor will it appear strange that a christian, who is thoroughly penetrated with the sacred truths delivered in the gospels, shall not only find sufficient consolation, but even joy, in suffering for love of him, whom he believes to be both infinitely amiable in himself, and infinitely good to his creatures; whom he knows to have laid down his sacred life for the love of him, and prepared eternal and incomprehensible rewards for those that love him: When a christian, I say, is thoroughly penetrated with these truths, and his heart accordingly affected with them, the sufferings of this life are then received not only with submission, but even with joy.

We have almost as many instances of this truth, as there have been martyrs in God's church. *St. Paul* says of himself, not only that he rejoiced, but *that he over-abounded with joy in all tribulation*: And the history of *St. Andrew's* martyrdom tells us, that this blessed apostle was even transported with joy, when he came in sight of the cross whereon he was to die: Finally, *St. Luke* relates, that *St. Peter*, and some others, having been publicly scourged by order of the *Jewish* council, *departed rejoicing from the council, because they were thought worthy to suffer contumely for the name of Jesus*. Oh! 'twas their love for this sweet name, that sweetened all their sufferings; that turned the marks of ignominy and disgrace into badges of the greatest honour; that, finally, bathed their souls in a torrent of delights, whilst their bodies streamed with blood, and smarted under the stripes inflicted by their cruel tormentors.

Neither has the force of this invincible charm of divine love only appeared in the apostles, but in thousands of martyrs, who, in the several persecutions raised against the Church, have not only

only laid down their lives for *Christ* his sake, but ever behaved themselves with an undaunted courage, and even chearfulness, amidst the most cruel torments : *They were made to pass thro' fire, (says St. Bernard) but their love could not be burnt ; they were put to the sword, but their love could not be cut asunder ; they were thrown headlong into the sea, but their love could not be drowned :* The love they had for *Jesus Christ*, rendered them invincible against all the attempts of cruelty and malice.

It was this invincible power of divine love, made *St. Paul* confidently defy any thing in this world to separate him from *Christ* : *Who (says he) shall separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall tribulation or distress ? Or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword ? Nay, in all these things we overcome through him who has loved us : For I am sure, that neither death, nor life, nor powers, nor things present, nor to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.* See here the invincible power of divine life : How it raises the soul above all the world ! How it arms her with a certain irresistible force and courage, against all the sufferings of this life ! And 'tis not to be doubted but the same cause would produce the same effect, if we made it our business to enkindle this sacred fire in our hearts ; and, instead of setting our affections upon earthly things, we endeavoured, by a daily progress in virtue, to make *Jesus Christ* the only object of our love.

Now then, I dare appeal to any one, whether it be not our interest, as well as duty, to make the study and practice of virtue our principal business ? For can there be a state of happiness under Heaven, to be compared to that of a
virtuous

virtuous christian? Is it not much happier, even as to this world, to be God's friend, than to be his enemy? Is not the testimony of a good conscience, though we should only consult self-love, preferable to the uneasiness and reproaches of a bad one? Finally, is it not much more comfortable to enjoy a constant peace of mind, than to repine and fret, and lie at the mercy of every crossing accident to vex and torture us? Now, 'tis virtue alone can procure the happiness of the one, and deliver us from the trouble and vexations of the other: 'Tis virtue alone can render us God's friends, and the objects of his fatherly love and protection: Finally, 'tis virtue alone can give us true peace of mind, fix in us an equality of temper, amidst the changes and vicissitudes of human life, and fill our hearts with joy, in spite of all the crossing accidents that can befall us.

And what then have we else to do, but to make it our principal study to advance daily in the practice of solid virtue? Since, though we had no other motive to determine us to it, this alone might suffice, *viz.* because we stand continually in need of a large stock of virtue, to support us under the necessary sufferings of this life: For, as long as we dwell in this vale of tears, there is a necessity of suffering. What condition soever we make choice of, what way soever we turn ourselves, we shall always meet with crosses: And is it not then our interest to have it always in our power to manage them so, as to render them both easy and profitable to us? Now, 'tis certain, that nothing but a great stock of virtue can procure us this blessing; for how is it possible we should have any comfort in our lives, as long as we are impatient and fretful, upon every trifling accident that thwarts our inclinations?

clinations? Must not that person be a continual torment to himself, whose pride makes him unable to brook the least neglect, or even imaginary affront? Whose impatience makes every light cross an insupportable affliction to him? Finally, whose sloth turns every little duty into an intolerable task? Oh! if we had once deeply settled in our souls the habits of patience, humility, submission to the will of God, and other such like charming virtues, experience would soon convince us, that there is no such thing as true happiness without them; and that with them alone any state whatever would suffice to make us happy. What stronger inducement therefore can we have to spur us on to virtue? Since true and solid happiness, even in this life, is the immediate fruit of it; and what is still far more, eternal happiness depends upon it, as being the undoubted reward of virtue in the life to come.

THE FORTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

CHRIST'S LOVE IN SUFFERING AND DYING FOR US.

Herein we know the love of God, because he has laid down his life for us. 1 John iii. 16

THESE words of St. *John* import no less, than that our Saviour's laying down his life for us, is such an unparalleled instance of his love, that from it alone we can truly judge to what degree he has loved us: *Herein we know the love of God, because he has laid down his life for us.* All other favours, though great in themselves, are in a manner eclipsed by it, and seem to lose their value in the comparison: It is on this account the Church, in her preface upon *Holy Saturday*, sets forth the greatness of this blessing, even

even with a lessening reflection upon the benefit of creation: *For what* (says she) *would it have availed us to have been born, had we not also been redeemed?* And in the same preface she expresses her grateful sense of it in these terms: *Oh! wonderful condescension of thy goodness towards us! Oh! inestimable force of love! to redeem a slave, thou hast delivered up thy only Son.*

This plainly shews the high idea the Church has of *Christ's* love, in suffering and dying for us: And since no consideration can be more powerful to inflame us with the love of God, nor by consequence furnish us with a stronger motive to hate sin, which is God's enemy; the subject of this entertainment shall be some reflections upon this surpassing instance of our Saviour's love; whence I shall take occasion to shew what influence it ought to have upon our practice.

It is related, in the 11th chapter of *St. John*, that *Christ* being about to raise *Lazarus* to life, was observed to weep. Some of the *Jews* then present, attributing his tears to a natural tenderness, and grief for the party deceased, said to each other with a kind of admiration, *Ecce quomodo amabat eum!* See how he loved him! Now, if the *Jews* concluded, from our Saviour's tears, that he had a more than ordinary kindness for *Lazarus*, and at the same time seemed to admire his goodness, in the tender concern he shewed on that occasion; when therefore we see him shed not a few tears, but the last drop of his most precious blood; when we see him covered all over with wounds, as so many eyes weeping blood for man; with what astonishment ought we to cry, *Ecce quomodo amabat eum!* See how he loved him!

However,

However, though we must own indeed, the *Jews* had reason enough to conclude, from our Saviour's weeping for *Lazarus*, that he had a great affection for him; yet, humanely speaking, there appeared but little reason for their being any ways surprized at it; because it was well known, that *Lazarus* had always been much devoted both to *Christ* and his apostles, and had in all likelihood contributed very liberally towards their subsistence. But if in his life-time he had been a declared enemy to him, and one of those who thirsted after his blood, there had been ground enough for wonder and astonishment, if *Christ* had notwithstanding given so remarkable a demonstration of his kindness for him, as even to honour him with his tears; because to love an enemy was a virtue unknown among the *Jews*, and much more to love him so, as to be sensibly affected with his misfortunes: And how then ought we to be transported with astonishment, when we see him love sinners, who are truly his enemies, so as to lay down his sacred life, and suffer the most cruel torments to deliver them from eternal death! This indeed is such an excess of love as justly challenges our highest admiration, and obliges all mankind to proclaim the wonder of it, and cry out with all the sense of gratitude their hearts are capable of, *See how he loved him!*

Oh! see and weigh it well; consider every circumstance of it. The angels offended God but once in thought, and were immediately condemned to everlasting flames: And why then were we more favourably dealt with? There is no reason to be given for it but God's infinite mercy, which was wholly gracious and undeserved. He justly condemned the angels; and

had not his mercy interposed, all mankind had fallen under the same condemnation: For as we were their fellow-criminals, if pure justice had given sentence, our doors had been the same with theirs, and Heaven for ever shut against us: But Almighty God out of an excess of goodness, to which we had no title, was pleased from all eternity to cast a merciful regard upon us, and provide an expedient to *cancel the hand-writing that was against us*, and rescue us from the punishment our sins had deserved.

Yet all this while, God clearly saw, how much this infinite mercy would be under-valued and abused. He foresaw, that though the mercy he designed was to be general and common to all, the greatest part of mankind would, through their own malice, frustrate all the ends of it; some by disowning the favour, and others by neglecting to apply to their souls the fruit of it, and even turning it into an occasion of their great ruin. Finally, he foresaw, that notwithstanding all the means he should provide to deliver them from the slavery of sin, innumerable souls would be so little sensible of the blessing offered them, as to chuse to continue under their bondage, rather than contribute any endeavours towards the happiness he should purchase for them. It was under this prospect he decreed our ransom: nor could the certain foresight of so general an ingratitude, provoke him to the least abatement of his intended bounty.

And here we ought particularly to admire his infinite goodness, in providing not a barely necessary, but even a *plentiful r. redemption* for those, who he knew, would make so little use of it. For though his wisdom had the choice of many both easy and effectual expedients, to wrest us from the power of darkness, his love would
pitch

pitch upon no other than the incarnation and death of his only Son; and a death as ignominious and cruel in all its circumstances, as could be inflicted on the most infamous malefactor: Whereas nothing is more certain, than that one single drop of blood, nay, one single tear shed by the Son of God, would, according to the strictest laws of justice, have made full atonement for all our sins; because the dignity of his person being infinite, it follows that the least humiliation of the Son of God, offered by way of atonement, was a satisfaction of infinite value, and by consequence sufficient to clear all debts, and *cancel the whole hand-writing, that was against us.*

But what was abundantly sufficient to satisfy God's justice, could not satisfy his love. Oh! 'twas his love for man and nothing but his love, made him spill that sacred blood, each drop whereof was the full price of the world's redemption, as prodigally, as if it had been the blood of some vile slave. It was love made him undergo both the confusion and torment of a public scourging, executed with the utmost barbarity: It was love made him exchange his heavenly diadem, for a painful crown of thorns; his robes of immortality, for a fool's coat; and his joys at the right hand of his Father, for torments amidst murderers and thieves: Finally, 'twas the force of love made him hang for three whole hours on the cross, labouring under unspeakable tortures, and exposed to the insults and scoffs of his enemies. *See how he loved him!*

You will say, perhaps, why then would our Saviour chuse to suffer such a painful death, if it was not necessary for man's redemption? I answer, that though it was not absolutely necessary

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fary for our example and instruction : And therefore our Saviour chose not to come in quality of our *Redeemer* only, but also to be our *master* and *guide* : Our master, to teach us the way to Heaven, and our guide to walk it before us. His life was to be the model of ours, and his death an everlasting source of grace to our souls. His poverty was to confound our love of riches ; his humility to cure our pride : and his painful sufferings to put out of countenance the eager pursuit of our ease and pleasures. 'Tis certain, if what sufficed to pay our ransom could have satisfied his love, all that precious blood, so profusely spilt, might have been spared : But to shew how dear our salvation was to him, he stuck at nothing that might any ways promote it, or encourage us to put in practice the means he should mark out for attaining to it. *See how he loved him !*

O Divine Redeemer : How dear has it cost thee to save my sinful soul ! My sinful soul, I say, which will perhaps be yet so cruel to herself, and ungrateful to thee, as to defeat all thy designs of love ; to frustrate all thy pains and labours ; and lastly to lose and damn herself, in spite of all thou hast done and suffered to redeem and save her. Is it then possible, that after such demonstration of love, we can have the hearts to continue thy enemies ! Can we do any thing but love thee ! Can our lives be directed to any other end, than to promote the honour and interest of thy holy name !

But, alas ! in spite of all the most dearing engagements to love, men usually remain cold, as if Almighty God had done nothing for them : So that it is hard to determine, which is the most astonishing wonder of the two ; God's love for man, or man's ingratitude to God : That
God

God should die for us, even when we were the objects of his just hatred; or that after he had died and suffered such torments for us, we should make so small a matter of still deserving, by repeated provocations, to continue under his displeasure: For, suppose the very meanest wretch upon earth had but lost a leg or arm, out of pure kindness for any of us; should we not have a hearty love for him; and take all occasions to testify our gratitude to him? And is it not then monstrous, that after the Son of God has even lost his life, and sacrificed himself wholly out of pure love for us, we should remain insensible of the obligation, and even repay him with offences and ingratitude! But let us now at least begin to make him some better return; and in order to it, let us consider how this may be put in practice by persons of all states and conditions.

The second book of *Kings* has furnished me with a passage very applicable to our present purpose. We read there, that when *Abshalom's* rebellion first broke out, and *David* was preparing to march against him, there happened to be at court, one *Ethai* a foreigner, and subject to the king of *Geth*. *David* being unwilling to expose this noble youth to any hazard, exhorted him to return home, and not involve himself in the dangers of a civil war. But *Ethai* being resolved to share with *David*, in his adverse as well as prosperous fortune, made him this generous answer. *As the Lord liveth, and as my Lord the King liveth, in what place soever my Lord the King shall be, whether in life or death, there also will thy servant be.* This generous resolution of *Ethai* proceeded doubtless from the sincere love and affection he had for *David*; and contains a great instruction for all Christians,

Christians, teaching them how they ought to be affected in their hearts, and behave themselves in all incident occasions towards their Lord and sovereign *Jesus Christ*, of whom *David* has a figure. Let us now make the application.

It is certain, that the only acceptable return we can make to *Christ* for his love, in laying down his life for us, is to love him with our whole hearts. For love if it be sincere, is not an idle or inactive virtue, which can lie hid in the soul without manifesting itself by outward works; for if it be there, it will certainly put us upon action: It will set all the powers of the soul at work, to study and follow in all things the divine will and pleasure; and as the love which *Ethai* had for *David*, made him, in the very first occasion that presented itself, readily offer his service to him, even with the hazard of his life; so will the love of God, if hearty and sincere, in all occurrences whatever, move the will to espouse God's cause, though life and all must be sacrificed in the defence of it. So that a true lover of *Christ* will be ever ready to make good this generous protestation of *Ethai*; *in whatever place my Lord shall be, whether in life or death, there also will thy servant be*; that is, he will chuse to suffer any extremities, and even death itself, rather than depart from his lord and master upon all wordly considerations.

However, there is a great difference betwixt *Ethai's* case in relation to *David*, and ours in reference to God. But the difference makes only to our confusion, if we shew ourselves less resolute and zealous in God's service, than he was to serve the King: Because what *Ethai* did for *David*, was done *gratis*; for he had no obligation

gation to hazard his life in his cause; whereas if God should please to demand it of us, we are bound, by all the ties both of gratitude and fidelity, to obey his orders. We are bound in gratitude, because he has already laid down his life for us; and we are likewise bound in virtue of our allegiance, because we have sworn fidelity to him at the font; and he being our sovereign Lord 'tis our indispensable duty to sacrifice our lives for him, and suffer death rather than abandon or betray his cause.

'Tis true, we may perhaps never be in the occasion of giving him these testimonies of the love we owe him; but we are always bound to be heartily prepared for it, and it will easily appear by our behaviour in other lesser occasions, whether this disposition be truly in our hearts: For though there be but few that have the opportunity to die for *Christ*, no man wants the opportunity of suffering something for him; because every one is almost daily in the occasions of suffering something for virtue or conscience-sake; and whatever is suffered on this score, is suffered for *Christ*. So that struggling with difficulties in the discharge of necessary duties, mortifying our passions, avoiding the occasions of sin, daily combating against some sinful habit, and the like, is all suffering for *Christ*; and though it be not dying for him, 'tis at least dying to ourselves for his sake. To say nothing of the crosses we daily meet with: For what way soever they happen to us, to bear them with a Christian patience, is likewise suffering for *Christ*.

Now then, if we pretend to love him so, as to be ready to follow him *in life and death*, we must shew it by our behaviour in these sort of trials; and since we be not in the occasion of
sacrificing

sacrificing our lives for him, let us give him at least some proof of our readiness for it by daily sacrificing to him what we can. As for instance, let us sacrifice our *ease* to him, whenever any duty calls upon us; let us sacrifice our *tongues*, either by speaking, when the good of our neighbour requires it; or by our silence, when it is unseasonable to speak; let us sacrifice our *eyes*, by checking their curiosity to look at dangerous objects; our *ears*, by stopping them to defamatory or immodest discourses; our *hands* and *feet*, by employing them, according to the order of his Providence, in the duties of our calling; let us sacrifice our sinful habits; our *intemperance*, by avoiding all occasions of excess in drinking; our *passionate* and *hasty temper*, by practising meekness, amidst provocations to anger; our *impure inclinations*, by resisting their solicitations to sin.

Finally, let us sacrifice our *wills*, by denying them all sinful or dangerous pleasures: For in this method we give in a manner our lives to *Christ*, by living daily to him; and though we fall not victims to him all at once, we sacrifice ourselves by piece-meals, and every part of our lives is consecrated by the many reiterated oblations of what we daily give to him. Nor is it to be doubted but if we be ready in all incident occasions, to make these small acknowledgments of our love and gratitude; we have just reason to hope we shall not be wanting to our duty in greater trials, and that we are truly disposed to follow *Christ* in life and death. But if we be generally unfaithful to him in these lesser occasions, whatever we may fancy or pretend in words, we have but little reason to think we love God with our whole hearts, or that we are ready to lay down our lives for him.

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It is here then we are chiefly to examine ourselves; not whether we have just ideas of the love of God, or make frequent acts of it with our lips; but whether we have effectually an inclination in our hearts to serve, obey, and please him in all things; whether we consult his will in all our deliberate actions: And if upon enquiry we find this love so prevalent to us, as to see nothing to the contrary, but that we are regularly directed and influenced by it, in the main body of our daily actions, we have then reason to hope, the love of God has taken possession of our hearts. But if none of these favourable symptoms appear, we ought to conclude all is not sound within; and never be at rest till by God's grace, we find so far a change as to break resolutely through all obstacles to our duty, and renounce whatever we know to be displeasing to God.

In order therefore to work ourselves, with the help of his holy grace, into this disposition, let us frequently raise our hearts to God with this holy resolution of *St. Austin, I will love thee, Lord, because thou hast loved me first.* He has certainly loved us first, because he loved us when we were his enemies, and loved us so, as to lay down his sacred life for us, poor worms of the earth; for us, most wretched and ungrateful sinners. But shall we always be thus wilfully unhappy? Shall we always persist in our wonted ingratitude? Shall we ever continue thus insensible, and make him no return for his infinite love? Oh! that we had begun to love him, as soon as the use of reason rendered us capable of paying him this tribute! That we had been sensible of this great duty, before corrupt nature had gained ground upon us, and subjected us to the tyranny of those sinful habits,

bits, which we have now such difficulty to overcome!

But what then, must we, like the wretched *Judas*, despair either of the grace or mercy of our Divine Redeemer? Oh! no, we know his grace is able to change the most corrupt heart, and his mercy to pardon the greatest sins. We must therefore rather imitate the happy *Magdalene*, and like her endeavour to deserve the pardon of our many sins, by *loving much*. The consideration of past sins must be so far from disheartening us, that it ought rather to spur us on the faster; and by continually putting us in mind how ill we have hitherto requited his infinite love, quicken our zeal and fervour, and hasten us on to satisfy, as far as we are able, for the long arrears of so many years love already due to him. And since no love can be sincere, unless it appears in a true change of life, we must resolve henceforward to declare a vigorous war against our own sinful habits, and never cease fighting against them, till we weaken them so, as to force them to yield to the power of his holy grace: And though we may sometimes be wounded in this holy war, we must not lose courage, nor lay down our arms; but have immediately recourse to the powerful remedies provided in this case: For we must have an assured confidence in his infinite goodness, that if we heartily detest our sins, and continue with unwearied patience to strive against them, he will have pity on us at length, and crown our endeavours with success, because we know, he came to seek and heal such sinners, and suffered the death of the cross to obtain grace and victory for them.

Armed

Armed therefore with this hearty confidence, and humbly prostrate before thee, our Saviour and Redeemer, we presume to make the same request, which a poor sinner like ourselves made to thee in the midst of all thy torments, and received even more than he had the confidence to ask. Our humble request then is, that thou wilt remember us in thy mercy at the last day. We confess we have no other title to this favour, than what we had, *viz.* thy own infinite goodness. For surely that title is as good now as it was then, because thy mercies are always the same: And though thy sacred arms are not now stretched out upon the cross as then, they are still wide open, and stretched forth to receive all penitent sinners, who have a confidence in thy mercies.

Grant then, Divine Redeemer, that at our departing hour we may hear that joyful sentence, which thou hadst the goodness to pronounce in favour of that happy sinner, who died with thee on mount *Calvary*. O grant us this, we humbly beseech thee, by thy bitter death and passion; by all thou hast done and suffered for us: And that our souls may be worthily disposed for this great blessing, grant that we may now begin to love thee with our whole hearts, and with all our powers; and that we may never cease to love thee to our dying day; for then we shall be sure to love and possess thee for all eternity.

THE FORTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

CHRIST THE PATTERN OF SUFFERING CHRISTIANS.

I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I streightened, till it be accomplished. Luke xii. 50.

CHRIST calls his passion a *baptism*, or washing; to represent the large effusion of blood, which the work of our redemption was to cost him: Which however was so far from casting any damp or terror upon him, that he complained *his heart was streightened*: that is, violently pressed with the vehement desire he had to have it accomplished. Here we see the virtue of patience and love of suffering, carried to its highest degree of perfection, in the person of *Jesus Christ*, whom all christians are bound to make their pattern. The subject then of this entertainment shall be, to shew the earnest desire our Saviour had to suffer for us, and how we ought to imitate him in it.

It is an undoubted maxim in theology, that every action of Christ was of infinite value, and consequently sufficient to atone for all the sins of the world. Hence therefore we may justly conclude, that whatever torments he was pleased to endure in the time of his passion, must be attributed to the desire he had to suffer for us, as being over and above the full price of our ransom. His whole life indeed was a continual series of sufferings, and not one of all these happened to him, but by his own free choice. His infancy was spent in banishment, and the rest of his years past either in obscurity, or the
hardships

hardships of a poor tradesman's life, or in the more laborious functions of his mission, and persecutions of his enemies; so that whatever part of his life we consider, the prophet's character, that he was *a man of sorrow*, was fully made out.

However, though every part of his life had its full portion of sufferings, the largest share was reserved the last part of it; to which the other were but as light skirmishes, if compared with the bloody combat on mount *Calvary*; which, as it was the end for which he came into the world, so the most considerable events of his life seemed all to have a tendency to it; as the poverty of his parents, the lowness of his condition, his retirement in *Egypt*, and the obscurity of his education at *Nazareth*; all which seemed as intended to extinguish the memory of the wonders that happened at his birth, which might otherwise have drawn the eyes of men upon him; and frustrated the main design of consummating the work of man's redemption by the ignominy of the Cross.

'Tis true, the lustre of his preaching and miracles, after his manifesting himself to the world, seemed sufficient to keep out of the reach of so cruel and shameful a death: But they had their allay appointed to obscure them. His doctrine was wonderful indeed, and his miracles surprising; but his condition was poor, his conversation plain and simple, and his person without any worldly character or ornament to distinguish it; and all these served as a counterpoise to the power of his words and works: His followers also, though numerous, being mostly of the lower sort, contributed rather to lessen him, than gain him credit or authority: Nay, his very preaching and miracles, which
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in all likelihood should have got him most friends, and greatest reputation, were by the malice of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, turned against him, and permitted by God to be the principal occasion of his death.

Now, who can after all this doubt, but that suffering and dying for us on the Cross, was what he earnestly thirsted after; since it was the end, to which he directed the most considerable events and circumstances of his life; disposing things so by his infinite wisdom, that not only the most remote and unconnected accidents in appearance, should have a tendency to it, but that even those things, which of themselves seemed most proper to hinder it, should most immediately contribute to it.

However, there are some particular passages of our Saviour's life set down by the Evangelists, which so clearly discovered the earnest desire he had to drink the bitter-cup of his passion, that I cannot omit a short recital of them. The first that offers itself, is the pressing haste he always shewed in relation to his death: For when the time of it was now drawing near, he acquainted his apostles with his resolution of going up to *Jerusalem*; knowing that he was the theatre, on which this bloody tragedy was to be acted; and that they might be assured he went to meet his death, and that nothing should happen to him without his foresight and permission, he gave them a large account of all the most considerable circumstances of the death he was to suffer; and 'tis expressly observed by two of the Evangelists, that our Saviour having ended his discourse, *began to walk before his apostles*.

Now, humanely speaking, one would have thought this circumstance too trivial to deserve the particular notice of two of the four Evangelists.

gelists. For what should it import us to know whether *Christ* walked before or behind, or in the midst of the apostles? And yet their insisting so nicely upon a circumstance, which in itself appears to be of no consequence, shews plainly, that some important instruction is couched under it; and I find that spiritual authors, in their reflections upon this passage, generally observe that the haste and eagerness our Saviour shewed on this occasion, was altogether an effect of the pressing desire he had to accomplish the work of man's redemption: Nay, 'tis observable, that the nearer he approached to the time of his passion, the more his pressing haste and eagerness seemed to increase upon him.

For being now at his last supper, some few hours before his entering into the garden of *Gethsemani*, he seemed to be under a certain holy impatience to have the hour of his passion come on; as appears plainly in these his words to *Judas*; *what thou designest to do, do with speed*. Which were not spoken to spur him on to evil, but to express his eager desire to suffer for us: Supper therefore being ended, he goes without delay to the garden of *Gethsemani*, where he knew he was to be delivered into the hands of his enemies: And when the moment was now come, as soon as he perceived the traitor making up towards him, at the head of a troop of soldiers, starting up from his prayers, he hastened to his disciples to bring them the news of it, and bid them rise without delay: But what's the meaning of this great haste? He has explained it both by words and actions: *Behold* (says he) *the hour is come, and the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners: Behold the man that will betray me is approaching*.

Then

Then making up to *Judas*, as *St. John* relates, he calls him *Friend*, embraces him, and receives his kiss, as knowing that to be the signal agreed upon with those that came to seize him. Yet lest the soldiers should mistake some one of the apostles for him, he told them no less than thrice, that himself was the person they sought for. Whereupon the soldiers falling backwards over, like men thunder-struck, he made use of his extraordinary power to raise them again: By the same miraculous power, restoring the ear of *Malchus* cut off by *Peter*; he checked him severely for drawing his sword in his defence, asking him, *whether he would not have him drink the cup his Father had given him*: Then delivering himself up freely to the soldiers, he gave them full power to satisfy their rage upon his sacred person. All which particulars shew plainly, how our Saviour was affected in relation to his passion, and the ardent desire he had to have it accomplished.

But if any one objects, that it seems somewhat hard to conceive, how so great and pressing a desire, as I have shewed our Saviour had to suffer and die for us, can be consistent either with that violent conflict, or the subject of his prayer in the garden, where he expressly declared that *his soul was sorrowful even unto death*, and with repeated instances beseeched his Father, that if it were possible, *the bitter cup of his passion might pass from him*. I answer, that we must distinguish between the impressions and fears of infirm nature on the one hand, and the desires of the heart on the other: For we must not imagine, that our Saviour, as a man, was of a nature insensible of grief or pain; or wore not the same flesh and blood, as other mortals do: since the prophet *Isaiah* says of him, that *he bore*



bore our infirmities ; and St. Paul to the Hebrews tells us, *that he was in all things tried as we are, yet without sin* ; that is, was liable to the same impressions of nature as other men. So that nature in him had its fears, repugnance, and impressions of grief and sadness, just as it has in us : But with this difference, that as his heart and will were always perfectly subject to God, so were those sensible impressions of infirm nature also perfectly subject to the government of his reason.

This being supposed, 'tis easy to shew, how that inward conflict of nature, which broke forth into streams of blood, was not at all repugnant to the desire he had to suffer for us : For though nature feared, though nature laboured under a heavy load of grief, and cried out for relief, yet the desires of his heart remained immoveably fixed in God, and perfectly conformed to the divine pleasure, which he knew was no other than that he should suffer and die for us. Nature indeed was startled, at the near prospect of the frightful torments he was to undergo, and therefore acted her part in crying out, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*. This was the language of flesh and blood ; but the language and sincere desire of his heart was, *nevertheless, Father, not mine but thy will be done* ; because what nature regarded as an evil, and by consequence as an object of fear, his reason, considering the will of God in it, regarded as a very great good : And therefore, whilst flesh and blood laboured under the most sensible apprehensions of approaching death and torments, and fought to be delivered from them, his heart and will embraced them with joy, and desired nothing

more than whatever his Father had decreed, should be fully accomplished in him.

So that all these *fears, repugnances, strifes, and outcries* of the inferior part of the soul, were perfectly over-ruled, by a strong and efficacious desire to accomplish the will of God his Father; and as on the one hand, he would both suffer those sensible impressions of infirm nature, and make them known to us, that we might not be disheartened, or think all were lost, when we should find ourselves labouring under the like infirmities; so, on the other, he would not permit them to affect any way his heart or will, to set us a perfect pattern of patience and resignation, under the heaviest load of pressures and afflictions. In a word, it was for our comfort he submitted to them, and he overcame them for our example and instruction: Because by the one he shewed what might be allowed to the infirmities of nature, and by the other he taught us how the heart and will ought to be disposed: Now let us see how we must imitate this excellent pattern.

It is not to be doubted, but when a person is under any great affliction, natural infirmity must have its grains of allowance: For as long as the soul is lodged in a frail and mortal body, do what you will, nature will in some degree take its own course, and act like itself: It will grieve, repine, shed tears, complain, seek comfort, and the like. For sighs and tears, complaints and moanings, are the natural language of persons in affliction: But then care must be taken, that whilst nature is allowed to act its part, God's cause be not abandoned. Care, I say, must be taken, that amidst those sensible impressions of grief and trouble, the heart and will remain immoveably fixed in
 God,

God, and perfectly resigned to the divine appointment. So that if nature cries out, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me*, the heart must immediately answer, *nevertheless, not mine, but thy will be done*. If nature struggles under the weight of its sufferings, and seeks for relief, the heart and will must be so disposed, as to chuse effectually the continuance of them, if it be God's will, rather than with his displeasure to purchase a deliverance from them.

And since this is the duty of every Christian, it follows, that we are likewise bound to use our utmost endeavour to moderate our natural *fears, sorrows, repugnances, and desires*, at least so far, as to take care, that they have no influence upon the heart, to the prejudice of that entire submission we owe to the will of God. Because the great danger of an over-violent fear, sadness, repugnance, or desire, is, that such like passions, when we give too much way to them, are apt to engage the heart in their interest; and then the will, instead of being the mistress, becomes their slave, and betrays God's cause. Whence we may clearly gather, that the virtues of patience and resignation, consist not in a sort of stupid insensibility, such as certain heathen philosophers had the vanity to pretend to, but in that christian disposition of the heart, which makes us effectually approve of, and submit to all the methods of God's providence over us, though ever so contrary to the desires and inclinations of nature.

Neither does the perfection of those virtues consist in a love or desire of sufferings for their own sake, but precisely as the will of God is considered in them. For (as *St. Austin* says) *no man loves the thing he suffers, though he loves to suffer*: Because the things we suffer, being either

real supposed evils, can in themselves neither be the objects of love nor desire; but to suffer them in conformity and obedience to the will of God, is the proper object both of the one and the other. And 'tis not to be doubted, but the apostles, upon this motive, both loved and desired to suffer: Since it is writ of them, that *they departed rejoicing from the council, because they were thought worthy to suffer contumely for the name of Jesus*: And St. Paul declares of himself, *that he was exceeding joyful in all tribulation*: To say nothing of so many thousand martyrs, who, in imitation of their Saviour and Redeemer, hastened to death and torments, with the same alacrity and joy as to a triumph.

Now all joy in the possession of any thing, being grounded on the love and desire we have of it, 'tis evident, those holy martyrs had a real desire to suffer: Not a desire of natural inclination; for death and torments are always frightful to nature; but a desire of the heart and will, which, as it was the prevailing inclination of their souls, over-ruled all the contrary inclinations of nature, and made them ready to suffer a thousand deaths, rather than dishonour or betray the cause of their heavenly master. 'Twas a desire grounded upon the firm faith they had, that their only true and solid happiness consisted in having the will of God accomplished in them; though with the loss of all they possessed in the world, even life itself: And therefore, when the event of things clearly convinced them, that Almighty God was pleased to call them to such hard trials, they heartily rejoiced in having so favourable an occasion to shew their fidelity to him.

This then is that holy disposition we ought to enter into, and arm ourselves with, against
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all the troubles, persecutions, crosses, and afflictions incident to human life: For we must not imagine, as if none besides the apostles or canonized saints, were concerned in the obligation of imitating their heavenly master in this difficult point; since St. *Peter* has declared it to be a part of every Christian's calling: *Hecunto* (says he) *ye are called, because Christ also suffered for us, that we may follow his footsteps.* So that patience under adversity, resignation to the will of God, and a hearty readiness to suffer whatever crosses he shall please to send us, are the essential qualifications of a disciple of *Christ*. *Whoever* (says *Christ*) *will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me:* And again, *He who carried not his cross, and follows me, is not worthy of me.* These are the rules he has set to all his disciples; that is, to all that profess themselves Christians, who therefore ought to be always in a chearful readiness to put them in practice.

And truly, since our circumstances here in a country, where we are under the lash of many penal laws, are such, that we can never be sure, but we may sooner or later be put to the trial, whether we are truly disciples of *Christ*; we ought to arm ourselves before-hand, with all the virtues necessary to support us in the day of battle, that when it comes, we may then resolutely stand our ground, and like those valiant champions of *Christ*, who sacrificed all they had for the interest of his name, fight courageously under his standard, by choosing to undergo the greatest extremities, rather than abandon the cause of justice, or depart from our duty to God.

But then we must take care to prepare ourselves for those greater trials, by our

him in lesser ones : For if we permit ourselves to be overcome by dwarfs and pigmies, how shall we be able to grapple with giants ? If our patience yields under every trifling accident that crosses our humours, how will it hold out under a violent persecution ? If our sloth and love of ease make us indulge ourselves in every thing ; if we have not courage to use at least so much violence to our inclinations, as to conquer the repugnance we have to very easy duties, how shall we have strength and resolution enough to surmount difficulties, which will try the constancy and virtue even of the most zealous Christians ?

It is an easy matter to flatter ourselves with seeming resolutions, of doing great things, whilst the danger is at a distance ; but it is most certain, that they, who are now so addicted to their ease and pleasures, as to be unwilling to put themselves to any inconvenience for God's service, will be in great danger of quitting the cause of justice and religion, when their standing to it must expose them to great sufferings and troubles.

We must therefore begin now to train ourselves up to these difficult combats ; *first*, by a great fervour and assiduity in prayer ; *secondly*, by a constant practice of patience in the small crosses we daily meet with ; and, *thirdly*, by denying ourselves many things, to which we are inclined : For by this method, if it shall please Almighty God, to call us to harder trials, we shall be better able to resign ourselves in all things to his holy will and pleasure.

THE FORTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

OF PHARISAICAL VIRTUE.

Unless your justice abounds more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Mat. v. 20.

THE word *justice*, may be taken either in a strict or large sense: *justice*, strictly taken, is a particular virtue, which inclines us to give to every man what belongs to him; and in this sense a fair dealing man, or one that never wrongs his neighbour, either in his goods or reputation, is called a just or upright man: But *justice*, taken in a larger sense, and as it is to be understood in the words of my text, is of a much more ample signification, and imports a certain complex or collection of all virtues: For, according to this latter meaning of the word *justice*, he alone can be counted *just*, who is in the state of grace, that is, free from all mortal sin: For, let our dealing be ever so fair and upright in relation to men, if our souls be tainted with any one mortal sin, we are void of this *justice*, and reputed *unjust* in the sight of God. So that the meaning of our Saviour's words is, that unless we be more *virtuous* and *perfect* than the *Pharisees* were, *we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.*

It is therefore a point of great importance, to inform ourselves exactly in what particulars the virtue of the *Pharisees* were defective; and by consequence, in what quality or degree of virtue we are bound to surpass them, under pain of eternal damnation. We plainly see here is nothing less at stake than our eternal salvation: Our Saviour's words are positive, that *unless*
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our justice abounds more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Since therefore 'tis impossible to comply with any obligation, unless we first know what it is, 'tis doubtless our nearest concern to examine what those virtues are, which were wanting to the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, and without which we shall be excluded from the kingdom of Heaven: And truly, nothing but a supine neglect of salvation, can render us indifferent in a matter of this importance.

Suppose our lives and fortunes were at stake, and a skilful lawyer should inform us, that there are certain formalities to be observed in the law, the omission whereof would utterly ruin our cause; should we not be very solicitous to be instructed what those formalities are, that we might be exact in the observance of them? Now this is our very case, in a matter of importance infinitely greater: For 'tis not a life that passes in a moment, nor a few earthly possessions, liable to a thousand chances, but an everlasting life, and the infinite treasures and joys of Heaven, that are at stake. Our Saviour has informed us, in the words of my text, that there are certain dispositions essentially requisite for the purchasing the treasures, and attaining to this happy life: He tells us, that the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* were void of these dispositions; and that unless we acquire them, and so surpass them in virtue, we shall perish eternally. Ought we not then to enquire, with the utmost care, what these dispositions are, since without them, we cannot possibly be saved? I presume then, it will be a charitable office to clear a point of this importance; and 'tis what I shall endeavour to do in this entertainment, by marking out the most considerable defects of the
Scribes

Scribes and *Pharisees*, and shewing how we must avoid them.

Before I proceed to lay open the defects of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, it will not be amiss to give some account of the virtues they practised: *First*, then, our Saviour never accused them of any defect in their *faith*: They believed, whatever they imagined at least, that God had revealed to their fore-fathers: They had a great respect and veneration for the law of *Moses*, and it was their greatest glory to profess themselves his disciples: They lived in the expectation of their *Messiahs*, which was the fundamental point of their religion: Nay, they were so zealous for the conversion of infidels, that they often made long and toilsome journeys by land or sea to gain one proselyte.

But, *secondly*, our Saviour never accused them of any gross crimes; for he neither charged them with *idolatry*, nor violating the *Sabbath-day*; nor with *murder*, or *adultery*, or *theft*, or *bearing false witness against their neighbour*: They were also most exact observers of the ceremonial law, even to the utmost critical niceties; insomuch, that they were highly scandalized at the apostles, because they did not wash their hands before meals; and because, being one day pressed with extremity of hunger, they plucked some ears of corn on the *Sabbath-day*: Besides, they fasted twice a week, and their fasts were very rigorous: They spent much time in prayer: They bestowed great alms on the poor, and were punctual in paying tithes, not only of things commanded by the law, but even of the smallest herbs that grew in their gardens: And who would not now imagine, but that the lives of these men might be proposed as patterns of virtue, even to the best of Christians? Were

we thus punctual in the observance of all outward duties, so addicted to prayer, so just to our neighbour, and charitable to the poor, as these men were, should we not be apt to set a value on ourselves, and think ourselves secure of salvation? And yet Almighty God, the searcher of hearts, has pronounced their condemnation, and forewarned us, that *unless our justice abounds more than theirs, we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven*. Now then let us examine what their defects were, that we may take care to avoid the rock on which they were shipwrecked.

Their first defect was the pride of their hearts; the two chief branches whereof were a presumptuous opinion of their own holiness and merits, and a great contempt of others: This proud opinion of themselves, and contempt of others, was chiefly occasioned by their great exactness in all outward duties: Nor is this to be wondered at; because all outward actions being clear and visible, and the imagining that all virtue consisted in a punctual performance of them, they thought themselves perfect patterns of virtue, and free from all defects: Hence it was, that instead of prostrating themselves before Almighty God in quality of criminals, and with an humble sense of their own unworthiness and misery, they planted themselves before him bolt-up-right, with a certain air of confidence and arrogance, as if they came rather to upbraid him, with the signal services they thought they did him, than to supplicate for mercy and pardon of their sins: Finally, the corruption of their hearts being wholly concealed from them by their excessive pride, they were entirely void of that humble disposition recommended by St. Paul, which obliges us, *to work our salvation in fear*

fear and trembling; to lament daily before Almighty God the wounds of our souls, and have recourse to him with confidence indeed, but a confidence wholly grounded on his infinite goodness, and the merits of *Jesus Christ*.

But this presumptuous opinion they had of their own holiness and merits, gave birth to a second criminal disposition, no less odious in the sight of God than the former, *viz.* their contempt of others: This appears in the proud prayer of the *Pharisees*, related in the 18th chapter of *St. Luke*; where, instead of making an humble confession of his sins, he recites a long catalogue of his own good works, and thanks God *for that he was not so bad as other men*, particularly the *Publican*, whom he saw praying at the same time in the temple: Nay, this contemptible opinion of others, and vain conceit of themselves, was carried to such a height, that they separated themselves from noted sinners, as from persons unworthy of their conversation, or even to touch any part of them: For it was upon this account, that they were so highly scandalized at our blessed Saviour, who refused not to eat, and drink, and converse with sinners, and permitted a notorious sinner to wash and kiss his feet.

Finally, as they had a great opinion of themselves, and contempt of others, so had they also an insatiable ambition of being honoured and esteemed by all the world: They challenged to themselves the first place in all assemblies, and required a particular respect to be paid them as they passed through the streets: They took upon them a certain air of authority, and affected to be called *master*: But, above all, they had a singular ambition to reign in the hearts and esteem of the people; for which end
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it was their practice to go from house to house, and insinuate themselves into the favour of certain bigoted women, as being the most proper subjects to pass their cheats upon.

Our Saviour taxes them with all these things in the 24th chapter of *St. Matthew*; where he discovers to us a second essential defect, which ran universally through all their actions, and tainted them in the very root, *viz.* a desire of vain-glory in the performance of them: For they did every thing (as *Christ* testifies) *to be seen and esteemed by men*: When they fasted, they put on an air of sadness, disfigured their faces, and affected to look pale, that the world might have an opinion of the rigour of their fasts: They chose certain thorough-fares of the town to pray in, that people passing by might take notice of them; and when they distributed alms, they caused a trumpet to sound before them, that the whole town might know of it.

Thus we see the two principal defects of the *Pharisees* were *pride and vain-glory*: Let us now consider how we must avoid these two dangerous rocks: Their first defects, as I have observed, was occasioned by their great exactness in performing outward duties: Must we then omit them, or perform them carelessly, for fear of being proud, as the *Pharisees* were? By no means; because a faithful performance of exterior duties, whether relating to christianity in general, or any one's particular calling, is not only commendable, but of obligation: We must therefore be faithful in performing all the duties of the religion we profess: *Sundays* and holidays, commanded by the Church, must be religiously observed; our morning and evening devotions must never be omitted; we must fast and pray, frequent the sacraments, and be pre-
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sent at the sacred mysteries of the altar, and other public devotions, both with an inward attention, and such an outward decency, as may give edification to all that see us; finally, no exterior duty is to be neglected.

But we must not stop here; nor flatter ourselves that this alone suffices to salvation: For a Christian may be condemned, as the *Pharisees* were, with all this appearance of piety and virtue; because this is partly the shell and outside of devotion: And therefore farther care must be taken, that our outward actions be so accompanied with solid humility of the heart, and sincere charity to our neighbour, that we may be as truly virtuous in the sight of God, as we appear to the eyes of men: So that it is a dangerous error to imagine, the bare performance of outward duties is sufficient to salvation; because salvation is not to be attained without true virtue, and all true virtue, though it manifests itself by outward works, must be seated in the heart. Whoever is most *humble, meek and patient*; most *charitable, mortified and resigned*, in all things to the will of God, is doubtless the most truly virtuous; and, by consequence, whoever is neither *humble, nor meek, nor patient*, nor *charitable* to his neighbour, nor *mortified* in his inclinations, nor *resigned* to the will of God, is not at all virtuous, though he be ever so devout in appearance. Pride, ambition, presumption of ourselves, or a contempt of others, are all great sins in the sight of God, and perhaps more hateful to him, than sins that are counted infamous amongst men. *Lucifer*, and the other apostate angels, are a frightful instance of this truth; for they were only guilty of pride, and yet that sin alone transformed

II4. MORAL ENTERTAINMENTS.

formed them into devils, and threw them into everlasting flames.

The consideration of this truth may serve as a most effectual preservative, both against an overweening confidence in our virtue, and contempt of others for faults, of which we are not conscious to ourselves: For how well soever our outward comportment may be regulated, it being certain, on the one hand, that we are all more or less guilty of pride, and wholly uncertain, on the other, to what degree we are infected with it, it follows, that we can never form a positive judgment, that we are more virtuous than our neighbour, though we see him fall into sins, of which our conscience is wholly clear, because, for ought we know, our souls may be so tainted with pride, or other spiritual sins, as to be more criminal in the unerring judgment of Almighty God, than those whom we despise for sins of a grosser nature, whereof we know ourselves not guilty.

But besides the proud opinion of themselves, which the *Pharisees* were guilty of, they stand charged (as I have observed) with another criminal disposition, in *doing all their works to be seen and praised by men*: Which desire of vain-glory poisoned their very best actions, destroyed their whole merit, and entitled them to no other reward than that of the hypocrites; for as they laboured to gain the esteem of men, so our Saviour told them, they should receive their desired reward in this life.

It is certain, that to make any creature our last end, is attributing to it that honour which is due to God alone, who, as he is the *first cause*, so is he the *last end* of all things. All creatures void of reason, are immediately directed to this end by God himself: They all act,
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move, or rest, according to the system established by the eternal Wisdom, and are but so many instruments and executioners of God's unchangeable decrees: But man having received a rational soul, and being endued with a free will, has a capacity within himself of chusing the end and motive of his actions: But this capacity is charged with an indispensable obligation of directing them to that end, for which he was created; and since this is no other than God himself, whenever he acts upon any other principal motive, than that of pleasing Almighty God in this life, and enjoying him in the next, he swerves from the end of his creation, he debases himself, injures his Creator, and subverts, as far as in him lies, the order of his Providence: and this was precisely the crime of the *Pharisees*, in doing all their works merely to gain the applause and esteem of men.

If then you ask, how this great evil may be avoided? I answer, that the best, and indeed the only effectual means to secure ourselves against it, is to purify our hearts from all inordinate affection to creatures. The reason hereof is clear, because in every thing we do, we are apt to have the greatest regard to the object we love most. So that whoever is strongly affected with any thing of this world, is in great danger of performing the main body of his actions for the love of that object. This was the very case of the *Pharisees*: For they had a passionate love for the esteem of men, and therefore they performed all their actions to acquire that esteem. This was the idol of their hearts; this they preferred before Almighty God; to this they sacrificed those outward works of piety and virtue, which if they had been performed for the love
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of God, would have entitl'd them to an eternal reward.

Whence it follows, that every man's predominant love is a bias upon his heart, which continually moves and turns it to the proper object of that love; and therefore if our hearts were clear from all inordinate affection to creatures, we should have no earthly bias to turn away our attention from Almighty God; nay, we should then most certainly love God above all things; and whoever regards Almighty God as the object of his principal love, will easily perform all his actions for love of him; that is with a sincere intention to please him in this life, and a hearty desire to possess him in the next. For what can be more easy, than a sincere desire to please a person whom we sincerely love? What more easy than to aim effectually at the everlasting fruition of an object, with the love whereof our hearts are strongly and sovereignly possessed? So that the rectifying our intention, in the performance even of the most ordinary duties, is not so difficult a thing as some seem to make it. *Love, and do what thou wilt*, says St. *Austin*, meaning the love of God: Because that love will of itself lead us to the intention we ought to have in every thing we do; and we shall be in no danger of seeking, with the *Pharisees*, the esteem of men, preferable to that of Almighty God, if we sincerely love him above all things.

However, we must observe, that this intention, though ever so pure, of pleasing God in every thing, cancels not the obligation we have of contenting and pleasing one another, according to the order established by Almighty God. Servants are doubtless bound to endeavour to please their masters, children their parents,

rents, and married persons owe this duty reciprocally to each other. But my meaning is, that we are bound to comply both with these and all other duties, principally upon this motive, because Almighty God requires them of us: So that a sincere desire to please God, and obey his holy will, must always be the principal end even of those actions, whereby we seek to please and content one another.

I shall therefore conclude with this excellent instruction our Saviour gave to the *Pharisees*, *hæc oportuit facere, & illa non omittere*. It becometh us to do the one, and not omit the other. We must not only imitate the *Pharisees* so far, as to be exact with them in the performance of all outward duties, that by our good example, we may mutually encourage one another in piety and virtue: But we must also be careful to rectify our hearts, by a sincere intention and effectual desire to please God, and obey his holy will in the performance of them: We must follow them in a diligent practice of the duties of the religion we profess; but we must avoid their ostentation, arrogance, and pride. Finally, we must imitate their zeal for the conversion of souls, their justice in paying to every one what is due to him, and their charity to the poor: But we must beware of their uncharitableness in judging, censuring, or despising our neighbour. And thus our virtue will now abound more than theirs, and our reward be proportioned to it hereafter.

THE FORTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE DANGER OF LUKE-WARMNESS.

I would thou wert either cold or hot. But because thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to spew thee out of my mouth. Rev. iii. 15. 16.

THESE words represent the dangerous condition of luke-warm Christians: For they import no less than the state of tepidity, though absolutely preferable to that of professed libertines, is attended with some dangers, in which the other is not concerned; and is in effect so displeasing to Almighty God, that he threatens the luke-warm with an eternal separation from him. This is the truth I intend to make out in this entertainment. But lest persons of a scrupulous conscience should by mistake appropriate to themselves, what belongs no ways to them, because their state is diametrically opposite to that of tepidity; I shall first draw out at large the character of a tepid or luke-warm Christian, that they who are concerned may see themselves in it, and they who are not, may not be frightened with dangers, which are at the greatest distance from them.

St. *Anselm* has epitomized the whole character of a luke-warm Christian in this short sentence. *Tepidus est, qui inter virtutes et vitia fluctuat.* He is one that wavers between virtue and vice: For he is in a kind of middle state between the *zealous* or *devout Christian* on the one hand, and *loose livers* on the other; being neither bad enough to be counted *vicious* in the eyes of the world, nor good enough to be truly
virtuous

virtuous in the sight of God. He aims to serve two masters at once, and divide himself equally between God and the world, so as to gratify nature with all the conveniencies and pleasures of this life, without forfeiting his title to the rewards of the next: For his chief business is to purchase Heaven at as easy a rate as is possible, and renounce no more of present satisfaction, for it than he must needs. This makes him always inquisitive to know the exact limits of any obligation; and though there appears in this a concern not to transgress, it proceeds, however, from an ill root, *viz.* a fear of overdoing. So that whereas persons of a tender conscience, are commonly apprehensive of falling short of their duty, the tepid Christian's greatest care is never to go beyond it; and he is always more afraid to do too much than too little.

It is true, he expresses an abhorrence of walking in the *broad way*; because the gospel declares it leads to hell and everlasting perdition, which he says he is resolved to avoid. But he is for enlarging the *narrow way* as much as may be; and for that purpose, is always provided with a good stock of cases that favour liberty and may serve upon occasion to bring his conscience over to his inclinations: For since he knows himself obliged, under the pain of eternal damnation, to keep both the commandments of God, and precepts of the church; therefore, to prevent his being too uneasy under the burthen, he usually endeavours, by forced interpretations, to accommodate them so to corrupt nature, that conscience and self-love may be both satisfied at once. In a word, the highest pitch of virtue he aspires to, is to avoid great crimes and *mortal sins*: But as to *venial sins*, he is sure they

they will never damn him ; and for his part, he is not ambitious to be a canonized faint, but will be satisfied with any place in Heaven ; so that if any dispute arises betwixt his conscience and his inclinations, he examines not whether the matter in question be lawful or unlawful, but whether it be a venial or mortal sin. If he judges it to be but venial, his inclination generally carries it against his duty.

But the main principle he pretends to govern himself by, and which gives the most plausible colour to his actions, is, that *all virtue consists in a mean* ; that extremes of any kind are blameable, and every thing ought to be done with moderation : For he pretends to be a great lover of moderate ways, as being both less dangerous and more lasting : And without all dispute it is the golden rule of human life, if not abused by misapplication : For the very best principles, if taken by the wrong handle, may lead to the most dangerous errors. And so it happens in the case of the luke-warm Christian, who pretending to steer his course to Heaven in a middle way, between *bigotry* and *libertinism*, generally mistakes his way, and strikes upon one of the rocks he pretends to avoid : Because judging of things by inclination, which always favour the looser side, he often takes that for the middle way, which borders very close upon the worst of the two extremes ; and so, for fear of erring a little on the *right side*, he commonly goes a great deal out of the way towards the *left*.

As for instance, professed libertines stick at nothing, but let loose the reins to all irregular appetites, without any regard to duty or conscience ; and this without all dispute is the extremity of wickedness. Devout and zealous Christians

Christians are, on the contrary, not only solicitous to satisfy all duties of obligation, and avoid whatever is prohibited under pain of eternal damnation, but often go some steps beyond the literal injunction of the precept; practice many works of supererogation and mortify their humours even in things that are indifferent. Now this the tepid Christian looks upon as a high strain of bigotry, and therefore only pretends to keep in what he calls his *middle way* between these two.

I shall exemplify in the duty of *fasting*, which has two branches: *First*, to abstain from flesh, and, *secondly*, to eat but one meal; both which being troublesome to nature, any slight indisposition, which he may magnify to his physician or director, as he pleases, serves for a sufficient pretence to plead for a dispensation; which being obtained, his conscience as well as body is at ease. But if there be no manner of pretence for a dispensation, and this troublesome task must needs be performed, he studies at least to make it as easy as he can, within the limits of the precept. So that what with good large allowances both in the morning and at night, and the liberty he gives himself over and above, of drinking betwixt meals as much as upon other days, he strains the commandment as far as he thinks he may, without manifestly breaking it: And this he calls his *middle* or *moderate* way, between the extravagant looseness of professed libertines, and the scrupulous niceties of devotees.

By the same rule he squares the method of his devotions. As for instance; the Church commands no other particular duties on Sundays and holidays, than that of hearing mass; persons of no other principles or conscience think it

it too much, even to perform this easy task: Devout and zealous Christians, on the contrary, are not satisfied with barely hearing Mass, but spend a considerable part of the day in praying, reading, and such like holy exercises. But the tepid Christian holds on in his *middle way* between these two; and therefore hears Mass indeed, if he can do it with ease; but having discharged this duty, and perhaps in a very negligent manner, he makes no scruple to spend the rest of the day idly, and for the most part worse than other days, not reflecting that this cannot properly be called *sanctifying the day*; as is manifest to common sense.

Again, the Church obliges all to confess and communicate at *Easter*; supposing it will be every one's concern to perform this devotion, as often as they shall be advised by their directors. Now libertines make as little scruple to neglect this duty as the former: Whereas zealous Christians take care to have recourse to the fountains of grace regularly at least once a month, and are solicitous to bring with them all the dispositions necessary to partake of the blessings they contain. But the tepid Christian thinks it too troublesome a task to be performed oftener than he must needs; or, if he comes to the sacraments once every half year or quarter, 'tis generally with such a lame preparation, that it were perhaps better for him not to come at all. For though once a quarter be, absolutely speaking, too seldom, yet once a year is too often to abuse the sacraments: And truly there is ground enough to fear, that one who consults his ease, and follows the dictates of sloth in every thing, that has a relation to the concerns of his soul, has as many sacrileges to answer for, as he makes

makes confessions and communions in that luke-warm state.

But 'tis no wonder the tepid Christian should thus make bold with the precepts of the Church, since he treats the gospel no better. *Christ* commands us to *seek first the kingdom of God*. Now profligate sinners live as if they had no faith of a future state; whereas zealous Christians shew plainly, in the whole conduct of their lives, that they have nothing so much at heart as the salvation of their souls; for the securing whereof, they study to please God in all their actions, avoid the dangerous liberties of the world, and deprive themselves, as far as in their circumstances will permit, of every thing that they apprehend to be an obstacle to it: But the tepid Christian keeps on in his *middle way* between these two; which pretended middle way is, in effect, the broad way of the world: For if indulging sloth and idleness; if living without rule or method; if being governed by caprice and humour, running into modish extravagancies, and passing day after day in a circle of dangerous or trifling amusements: cannot, without shocking common sense, be called, *seeking first the kingdom of God*, then this *middle way*, betwixt vice and devotion, in which the luke-warm Christian walks, can be no other than the *broad way*, which the gospel tells us, leads to everlasting perdition.

I shall now sum up the principal evidence of what has been said; that we may have a full view of his character all at once. A luke-warm Christian then is one, whose life is neither edifying, nor notoriously scandalous. He is full of sinful defects, and takes little care to correct them: In the discharge of duties, whether of prayer, fasting, or frequenting the sacraments,
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he generally has a regard to his ease; and therefore, performs them so by halves, that they turn to very little account. He makes nothing of venial sins, and seldom denies himself any thing that appears lawful in itself: He follows the common track of the world, without running into its grossest irregularities and encroaches upon the commandments, as far as he thinks he may, without transgressing in any thing notoriously criminal. He never aspires to any degree of perfection, and therefore never comes near it; and his very best works are commonly so faulty, that their defects outweigh their merit. In a word, he uses his soul as unmercifully as a miser uses his body; endeavouring to keep it just alive and no more.

Now, though this be the general character of a luke-warm christian; yet every part of it is not equally applicable to all: For tepidity has many branches, and every branch its several degrees; and by consequence, of those that are concerned, some are less guilty than others. Let every one take to himself the part that belongs to him: For by that he may in some measure judge in what degree of danger his eternal concerns are: But if any one upon viewing the picture I have drawn, finds it resembles him in every feature, he may conclude his state is full of danger. The main drift of this discourse is to convince him of this truth; and though the hints I have already given, particularly relating to the abuse of the sacraments, might suffice, I shall now add some farther proofs, to render him sensible of it.

I have observed, in the beginning of my discourse, that these words of St. *John*, *I would thou wert cold or hot*, &c. import no less, than that the state of tepidity, though absolutely preferable

ferable to that of vice, is yet attended with some dangers, in which the other is not concerned. It is this I shall now endeavour to make out, by shewing in the first place, that a luke-warm Christian may easily imagine himself to be in God's favour when he really is in mortal sin; whereas the palpable disorders of a person given to vice, rescue him at least from this delusion; and in this respect the condition of the one, is as much worse than that of the other, as a hidden distemper is more dangerous, than one that discovers itself by manifest symptoms; because the very discovery of a distemper, is at least one step towards its cure.

Now, that a luke-warm Christian is in great danger of falling under this delusion, is manifest from the very case of the Bishop of *Laodicea*, to whom the words of my text were addressed by *St. John*. For this unfortunate person not only thought himself in the state of grace, but even rich in merits: And yet Almighty God, the searcher of hearts, revealed to *St. John*, that his soul was in a most lamentable state; and therefore ordered his apostle to write thus to him: *Thou sayest thou art rich, and increased with goods, and thou knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*: which expressions carry doubtless too terrible a weight, to mark out any other state than that of mortal sin.

And has not every luke-warm Christian, tho' like the bishop, he perhaps feels not his conscience charged with any thing that is criminal; has he not, I say, reason enough to apply those words to himself, and suspect they describe exactly his case; 'twill appear he has, if we but reflect that the bishop was taxed with nothing but tepidity; and that this alone had consumed

all his spiritual treasure, and reduced him to the miserable nakedness and poverty described by St. *John*. For since like causes produce naturally like effects: does it not follow, that where there is a resemblance in the one, we may justly fear there is so in the other?

This alone suffices to ground a reasonable fear, that all luke-warm Christians are more or less concerned in the bishop's case; and that, like him, they are not only *poor*, and *naked*, but also *blind* enough to think themselves otherwise: I shall, however, produce some probable reasons, both for the one and the other, from the very nature of tepidity, and the principal branches of its character.

And, *First*, as to the negligent and heedless temper of a luke-warm Christian, this alone may easily betray him to many sins, whereby God's grace is forfeited, and that without his being aware of it. 1. To many sins of *omission*, which are chiefly occasioned by heedlessness and want of care. 2. To numberless sins of the *tongue*, which can only be prevented by a constant restraint and watchfulness upon that restless member; And 3. To many sins of *thought*: As rash judgments, unlawful desires, &c. which those who are not over-careful to observe the motions of their hearts, will easily become guilty of.

Then if we consider the innumerable snares, the devil has every where ready, to intrap the heedless and unwary Christian, how is it possible but his neglect and want of care, must needs render him obnoxious to many of them, since even the most cautious and wary can scarce escape being sometimes surprised? Suppose a man should walk with a great weight upon him in a slippery place, full of holes and precipices, would

would he not be every moment in danger of his life, unless he picked and chose his way with all the care imaginable? Now the world is full of traps, snares, and dangerous precipices, and we carry the weight of corrupt nature every where with us; nay, and the devil is over and above ready to push us down at every step; and can a person, that walks heedlessly amidst so many dangers, pretend to escape without many falls? 'Tis true, he often feels them not, and that compleats his misfortune, and makes good what I have said, *viz.* That he may often be in mortal sin and not know it; because the same neglect that occasions his falling into many sins, makes him often overlook them, and pass them by unobserved.

But, if we likewise consider the small account a luke-warm Christian makes of venial sins, and his aiming no higher than to avoid such as are mortal, this is so dangerous a disposition, that whoever is concerned in it will find, in the making up of his last accounts, that he has played booty against his own soul, and been only industrious to cheat himself: For how can it be imagined, that one who affects to be always venturing to the very brink of a precipice, shall not sometimes slip into it; or that a person ever disposed to encroach upon the commandments, as far as he thinks he may without transgressing mortally, shall not often mistake his aim, and go beyond the bounds he proposes to himself? From all which reasons it plainly follows, that a luke-warm Christian may easily imagine himself to be in God's favour, when he really is in mortal sin; which, as I told you, is the first reason why his condition may in some respects be said to be more dangerous, even than that of open vice.

The *second* is, because, considering the nature of his distemper, he is in greater danger of always continuing in the same state: For whereas barefaced vice is of itself a reproach to the party concerned, and his guilty conscience is every now and then apt to give him such uneasy thoughts, as may in time help to work him into a desire of changing his condition; the lukewarm Christian, on the contrary, being rarely concerned in any visible disorder, imagines all is well, and thinks of nothing less than a change of life: For not perceiving any thing considerably amiss in himself, he is very well satisfied with the state he is in: Nay, many times takes no small vanity in comparing himself to the libertine, and wonders how men can be so wicked: Thus instead of humbling himself, and daily lamenting his sins before Almighty God, he rather takes a certain secret pride in judging himself much better than his neighbour; and we may easily conclude, there is but little prospect of amendment in a person, who has not yet made the first step towards it, by being sensible of the danger he is in; not reflecting that the *slothful servant* mentioned in the gospel, was condemned, though he had no other crime but *sloth* laid to his charge: And thus the lukewarm Christian usually runs on enjoying hopes of salvation with a state perhaps inconsistent with it, till death opens his eyes, and undeceives him when it is too late.

But before I make an end, I must turn my discourse for a few moments to another sort of Christians, as opposite to those I have hitherto spoken of, as fire is to water; I mean persons of a scrupulous conscience; who out of an excessive fear, are apt to take to themselves every thing that is said only to alarm loose livers,
into

into a sense of their dangerous state. By persons of a scrupulous conscience; I mean those, who though they have a sincere desire to serve God, and an earnest solicitude to save their souls, are always upon the rack, and dissatisfied with every thing they do. If they be assaulted by any temptation, they conclude immediately they have consented to it, though they really detest it in their hearts: Their prayers, confessions, and communions, though performed with a seriousness and application, with which they ought to be at ease, are all wrong in their distempered imaginations.

Now whatever persons have been seriously and frequently assured by their directors, that they are concerned in this weakness, (for 'tis of these alone I speak) these, I say, ought to be no more alarmed with what they read or hear, concerning the dangerous state of lukewarm Christians, than if they should hear a warm invective against the most scandalous vices practised in the world, of which they certainly know themselves not guilty: For let them but consider every part of the luke-warm Christian's character, and they will find it to be as far from representing their case, as the picture of a *camel* is from representing a *gnat*.

A supine neglect in the concerns of salvation, is the characteristic sin of the luke-warm; whereas an excessive solicitude is, on the contrary, the faults of the scrupulous. The luke-warm lay themselves open to many great sins, by contemning those that are venial; but the scrupulous are, on the contrary, under a continual panic terror, and, as the *Psalmist* describes them, *trembling with fear, where there is no ground of fear*. The luke-warm consult their ease in all duties relating both to prayer, fasting, and the sacraments;

sacraments ; whereas the scrupulous make them a mere rack of conscience, and insupportable burden to their souls. The luke-warm are as slothful servants do every thing by halves ; and the scrupulous are like drudging slaves, perpetually sweating and groaning under the sweet yoke of *Jefus Christ*. Finally, the luke-warm are but too apt to presume upon God's goodness, whereas the scrupulous seem to regard Almighty God as an unmerciful task-master, or one that lies upon the catch to find fault, and resolved to pardon them nothing.

I know but one point, in which these opposite distempers seem to have a resemblance ; I mean, the difficulty of their cure ; though the cause of this difficulty in the one, is wholly different from that in the other. The usual root of it in scrupulous persons, is a strong prepossession that their director does not understand them right, and thinks them better than they really are ; and that by consequence they cannot depend upon his advice ; which certainly is the subtlest stratagem the devil can employ to perpetuate the disturbances and anxieties of these pious souls, and render useless the ordinary means appointed by Almighty God for their cure ; because it deprives them of the comfort and assistance of the person, by whose advice alone they can be cured. Now all I can say to this whimsical pretext (but I say it with all the assurance imaginable) is, that when a penitent has for several times laid open the state of his conscience, with all the candour and sincerity he is capable of, 'tis morally impossible his confessor should mistake his case, or form a wrong judgment of him. They who are free from scruples, and by consequence, the best judges in the case in question, are fully convinced of this truth ;

truth; and if persons darkened with fears and apprehensions, will not submit to the judgment of those, who see things in a clear light, 'tis a sign they resolve not to be cured. But if they are still willing to receive advice, the best thing they can do to be delivered from this racking evil, is to pay an humble obedience to their director, in every thing relating to their distemper: And in order to dispose themselves by degrees to this entire submission, they must be heartily convinced of the following truths.

1. That scrupulosity is no commendable quality, nor a help to devotion, but a great hindrance to it.

2. That there are dangerous *excesses* as well as *defects* in devotion; and that over-doing is a fault, as well as falling short in any duty whatsoever.

3. That they ought not to regard Almighty God as a censorious spy upon men's actions, but as an indulgent father, full of tenderness and compassion, particularly to those who seek sincerely to please him.

4. That the yoke of *Christ* is not a tyrannical law, imposed to oppress consciences, but to conduct men with comfort and safety in their way to Heaven.

5. That a conscience darkened with fears and scruples, is a treacherous guide, and never to be trusted to.

6. That to follow the judgment of directors, which is acting according to God's appointment, is both safe, and more easily answered to God, than to be governed by their own wills and fancies.

And lastly, that the plausible pretext of not being understood, or thought better than they are by their directors, is a snare of the devil,
intending

intending thereby to perpetuate their disturbances, and render them incurable.

Now to return to the luke-warm, who stand more in need of causticks than lenitives; the best advice I can give them is to meditate frequently upon *death, judgment, the eternity of hell-fire, the small number of the elect*, and other severe truths of the gospel, which may frighten them into a sense of their condition, convince them of their danger, and make them resolve upon a serious amendment of their lives.

THE FORTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF SPIRITUAL MARTYRDOM.

He that loveth his life shall lose it. John xii. 25.

THESE words of *Christ* are applicable to all the glorious martyrs, whose feasts are yearly solemnized by the Church: For they truly loved their lives, in shedding their blood for the honour and interest of their heavenly Master; and in so doing, gave the strongest proof of the ardent desire they had to be united for ever to him, since they were willing to purchase that happiness with the bitterest torments, and the loss of their lives.

But how can ordinary Christians imitate the heroick virtue of those champions of *Christ*? *First*, every one is bound to be heartily disposed to lay down his life for God's sake, if he should be pleased to demand that sacrifice of him; and thus he becomes a martyr, at least in preparation of mind: But, *secondly*, besides that martyrdom, which is accomplished with effusion of blood and the loss of life, there is a spiritual one, made up partly of the mortification

tion of our senses, and partly of interior sufferings, by which the will or inward man is afflicted and mortified, instead of the body; and every Christian will meet with almost daily occasions of suffering this martyrdom, if he will but strive to live up to his character, and discharge the most essential duties of it: His own inclinations, and the general corruption of the world, will furnish him with trials enough to exercise his patience, and render his life a continual combat; as I shall endeavour to shew in this discourse, wherein I intend to give you some account of this spiritual martyrdom, and shew how every one is bound to aspire to it; *first*, by dying to himself; and, *secondly*, by dying to the world.

The word *martyr* signifies any sort of witness; but common use has appropriated it to signify only such a sort of witness, as by his sufferings gives evidence for the truth of the gospel: And therefore all those that have sealed the faith of *Christ* with their blood, are by the Church called *martyrs*; because by laying down their lives, they gave public testimony, and became authentic witnesses of the truth of the faith they professed: But since the occasions of this martyrdom are now but rare, the generality of Christians are no otherwise concerned in it than in preparation of heart: I say, in *preparation of heart*, because all are bound to be so disposed as to be ready to lay down their lives rather than renounce their faith, or abandon the cause of justice: For whoever is not ready to sacrifice all he possesses in the world, rather than offend God mortally, has the testimony of his own conscience against him, that there is something in the world he loves more than God, and that by consequence he is already guilty of a mortal transgression,

transgression, against the first and greatest commandment of the law, which is, *to love God above all things.*

But, as I have already told you, there is another sort of martyrdom or suffering for *Christ*, the obligation whereof being grounded upon the very covenant we made with God, and swore to at our baptism, is wholly inseparable from the character of a Christian; and therefore begins to affect us as soon as we attain to the perfect use of reason, and only ends with our lives. This martyrdom consists chiefly in the mortification of the will, and its dying to all the lusts and irregular inclinations of corrupt nature, and so is properly called an *evangelical* or *spiritual* death. 'Tis called a *spiritual* death, because it is properly the effect of the spirit combating within us, and mortifying the desires of the flesh; 'tis called also an *evangelical* death, because all the moral precepts and maxims of the gospel have a reference to it, and instruct us in the method of it. And therefore whoever has the patience and courage to persevere his whole life in thus dying to himself, may be properly called a martyr of the gospel; because by so doing he gives evident testimony, that he is thoroughly and practically convinced of the truth and holiness of its doctrine.

But to give some farther account of the proper nature of this evangelical or spiritual death, I cannot set it in a clearer light, than by shewing how in all its effects it resembles those which a corporeal death produces in the body: For, in the first place, as violent pains and certain strugglings between soul and body, are the usual forerunners and attendants of a corporeal death; so this spiritual death is not to be attained to, without a long and painful combat between the
spirit

spirit and the flesh. For, as St. Paul tells us, *the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other.*

So that whoever resolves in earnest to die to himself, must begin with using violence to his natural inclinations, in order to master by degrees this opposition of the flesh to the spirit; since death without conflict, is as unusual in the order of grace as in the order of nature; and whereas this strife or combat against our natural inclinations, is the most painful parts of the spiritual martyrdom we have to suffer, whoever pretends to enter the list, must prepare himself for it with great courage and resolution. He must consider that man's life is a *warfare upon earth*, that he has listed himself under *Christ's* standard, and that in this spiritual war, as well as others, fighting is the only way to victory and triumph. He must not therefore be startled at the obstinate resistance he may meet with, either from old habits, or a stubborn temper, but readily embrace all the means necessary to conquer himself: And he must remember that if his combat be great, his reward and crown will be proportioned to it.

The second effect, wherein this spiritual death resembles the corporeal one is, that as this puts an end to all communication between soul and body, so the proper effect of a spiritual death, is to break off that correspondence with the flesh, which is only entertained by those, who therefore are properly called sensual or carnal men. This is the express doctrine of St. Paul, Rom. viii. where he discourses thus: *They who are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh, and they who are after the spirit, do the things of the spirit. But ye are not in the flesh,*
but

but in the spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwelleth in you For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if through the spirit, ye mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live.

By which words, St. Paul gives us to understand that a Christian, who is dead to the inclinations of corrupt nature, is so governed by the spirit, as to renounce all sinful correspondence with the flesh. And therefore in the 6th chapter of the same epistle, having exhorted the *Romans* to consider themselves *as dead in sin*, he explains himself thus, *let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof*; which is as much as to say, that he who is dead to sin, yields not to the sollicitations of the flesh; but considering it as an enemy to God, declares war against it, is watchful to avoid its snares, and rejects all its temptations with horror. For this is to be truly dead to sin, and to have broken off all such correspondence with flesh, as is contrary to the law of God.

For as long as the soul is united to a mortal body, and acts by the ministry of the senses, 'tis impossible we should be freed from sensible impressions; this being a privilege reserved for the life to come, when the happy change of our state will deliver us from its corruption, and rescue us not only from sin, but all temptations to it. However, as long as the soul keeps the reins in her own hands, and is so far mistress of the will, as never to entertain any sinful suggestion voluntarily, nor act upon any sinful impression, there is no illegal correspondence with the flesh; nor can the soul in this case be said to be alive to sin, though she be ever so strongly solicited by it; because the life of the soul is in the will, and as long as this yields not, but remains immoveable to sin, so long we are morally

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rally dead to it. So that as yielding to the solicitations of corrupt nature, is an undoubted mark of a sensual life prevailing in us, so there cannot be a better proof of the spiritual death I speak of, than to remain unmoved under all its most violent and repeated assaults.

These are sometimes the effects of natural constitution, and are apt to raise such dark mists about the soul as hinder her from seeing herself, and distinguishing between suggestion and consent; but they are much oftener the remains of past habits of sin: And therefore the parties thus concerned, must not be either surpris'd or dishearten'd at the frequency or violence of such assaults; on the contrary, they must expect them, and prepare themselves accordingly: Nor need they fear any prejudice from them to their souls, if they neither occasion them by some fresh fault, nor entertain them with deliberate reflection; for though the wilful disorders of their lives past, be in some measure the source of their temptations, yet it being suppos'd that they are now retracted by a sincere repentance, and become the object of their hatred and detestation, all the influence they have upon them is merely natural, and cannot affect them with a moral guilt, which must always be voluntary either in itself or its cause.

Now from this effect of spiritual death there follows another, wherein it resembles the corporeal one: For as a corporeal death, by separating the soul from the body, although it leaves the material structure and organ of the senses, yet destroys the use they are designed for by nature; so a spiritual death, by the fore-mentioned moral separation of the spirit from the flesh, although it leaves indeed the real powers of *hearing, seeing, tasting*, and so forth; yet it re-
strains

strains the use and exercise of them to such a Christian moderation, as to retrench all sinful, dangerous, and even many superfluous acts: For a Christian, who lives according to the spirit, and truly desires to die this spiritual death, judges himself bound neither to gratify his eyes with all sorts of objects, nor his ears with all sorts of entertainments, nor his palate farther than the support of nature, which a due regard to decency requires: Neither does he only deny himself all sinful excesses, as frequenting ill company: delighting himself with discourses offensive to God, or injurious to his neighbour; looking at immodest objects; drinking beyond the rules of temperance, and the like; but he also refrains from many diversions and pleasures, that are wholly indifferent in themselves, because though they be indifferent in themselves they are often dangerous in their consequence, by engaging the heart in an immoderate affection for them; and therefore chuses rather to deprive himself of them, than by enjoying them to expose himself to any danger of offending Almighty God.

But I have now represented only one part of the martyrdom or combat a Christian has to suffer, arising from the corruption and perverseness of his natural inclinations, which, like rebellious subjects, make a continual war upon him, and oblige him to those self-denials, without which they cannot be subdued: But besides this intestine war with ourselves, we have a no less troublesome conflict to sustain from the malice and injustice of the world, which, with its raileries or persecutions, is always ready to oppose the generous designs of those, who seriously resolve to model their lives by the rules of the gospel.

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As for instance ; if a person, that has for a long time practised all the modish vices of the world, becomes, through God's grace, sensible of the danger of his state ; and thereupon resolves to quit his former course of life, begins to keep regular hours, separates himself from the assemblies he used to frequent, addicts himself to prayer, and other duties of a christian life ; such a person must expect no quarter from the world ; it will treat him as a deserter, and be revenged of him for having abandoned its cause : He will be the subject of men's jests, and brought upon the stage at every merry meeting of his old companions : If he has a weak side, they will be sure to find it out, and expose it in the broadest light : They will put the worst construction upon all his actions, give an aggravation to every thing that may lessen him, and a spiteful turn to every thing that should recommend him. This is the treatment a Christian must prepare himself for, that has the courage to bid farewell to the modish vices of the world, and embrace a life conformable to the maxims of the gospel.

We have another instance hereof, relating to the obligations all Christians are under, of not revenging injuries or affronts : The gospel expressly forbids to take revenge, or return evil for evil ; and the world preaches up a contrary doctrine : if therefore, upon a principle of conscience, and in compliance with the command of *Christ*, a person puts up a considerable affront, suffers it, as he ought to do, with a Christian patience, and demands no satisfaction of the author of it, he shall be posted up for a coward, and become the scorn of all that stile themselves men of honour. A terrible temptation to flesh and blood ! And yet it is beyond all question,

question, that a Christian is bound to suffer this, or any other unjust reproach, rather than offend Almighty God : For our Saviour has expressly forewarned us, that *whoever shall be ashamed of him and his words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his glory* ; that is, whoever shall, through shame or fear of men's hatred or contempt, conform himself to the sinful ways of the world, shall at the last day be disowned by *Christ*.

However, the trial is yet harder, when the world threatens a christian not only with derision and scorn, but also with loss of liberty and forfeiture of goods, in case he refuses to comply with certain proposals, as the espousing an unjust cause, taking unlawful oaths, and the like ; which he cannot yield to, without wounding his conscience mortally ; for here a frightful scene of misery and want, the ruin of children and family, the numberless temptations of necessity, and a long train of sufferings, will present themselves before his eyes, and press hard upon him for a compliance, as the only means to prevent these evils : And what then must a Christian do in this hard case ? Our Saviour has fully answered the question in these few words, *if a man cometh to me, and hateth not his father and mother, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple* It is plain then what part a Christian has to act ; for he is certainly bound to give a deaf ear to all the solicitations of interest and ease, alluring him on the one hand, and the terrors of contempt and poverty, threatening him on the other : He must imitate the heroic virtue of *Susanna*, who, being tempted to adultery, chose death itself, rather than stain her soul with that sin : *It is better (said she) to fall into*

into the hands of men, than sin in the presence of Almighty God.

And though this seems a hard lessen to nature, 'tis no more than what men practise daily upon motives even merely human, or even sinful: For how many expose themselves every where, in the service either of their own or some foreign prince, to all the hardships and hazards of a bloody war, in which imprisonment, the loss of a limb, or death itself, may be their lot? And can it then be hard for a Christian to suffer as much for God's sake, and with the certainty of an eternal reward as men undergo upon very trivial encouragements for one another? Again how many sacrifice their honour and estates, destroy their health, shorten their lives, and ruin both themselves and their families, merely to gratify an extravagant humour, or some criminal passion? And ought not then a Christian to be at least as bold and venturesome to please God, as sinners are to please themselves? Ought he not to give as signal testimonies of his zeal in a good cause, as sinners do of theirs in a wicked one? The case admits of no dispute, and it is a clear proof of what I have said, *viz.* that a Christian's life is a life of combat and trial; and that every one, who makes the gospel his rule, will have sufferings enough to entitle him to the honour of being a martyr of it, though he neither sheds his blood, nor dies under the hands of the executioner: His martyrdom is a death indeed; but a death which only destroys the *body of sin*: It is a martyrdom, which (as St. Paul describes it) *crucifies the world to us, and us to the world*: Finally, 'tis a martyrdom, whereof we ourselves are the chief instruments and executioners, and which must last as long as we live.

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I shall conclude my discourse with a necessary reflection, in reference to the parallel I have made, *viz.* that whereas a corporeal death is incapable of degrees, because one dead body cannot be said to be more dead than another; a spiritual death on the contrary, admits of many degrees, because it is perfected in us by the same degrees that the life of charity is improved in our souls: It being certain, that the more we love God, the more we die to ourselves. We must therefore make a large difference between what is of indispensable obligation, and what only regards perfection: As to what falls under indispensable obligation, every Christian is bound to be so far dead to himself and the world, as to be heartily disposed to sacrifice all rather than offend God mortally; for whoever has not this disposition in his heart, (and God sees whether he has it or not) has not yet attained that degree of charity, which consists in an effectual preference of God before all things, and without which no man can be saved.

But as to what regards the utmost perfection of this spiritual death, we are not bound to attain effectually to it; for then there would be no diversity of mansions in Heaven: We ought however to desire and endeavour it, according to the measure of our strength, and to be still making some nearer approaches towards it; for if we be but still moving forwards, we cannot fail of attaining, at length, to the happiness Almighty God has prepared for those that love him sincerely, and serve him to the utmost of their power.

THE FORTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF TEMPTING GOD.

It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Mat. iv. 7.

THIS was our Saviour's answer to the second temptation of the devil, who being baffled in his first attempt upon *Christ*, was permitted to take him up to the battlements of the temple, and there suggested to him to throw himself headlong down; pretending, that by so doing, he would shew his confidence in God, who had promised that *his angels would take care of him, and bear him up in their hands, lest at any time he should dash his foot against a stone*: But our Saviour soon silenced the tempter with the above-said answer, *It is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*; instructing us thereby, that tho' God has also charged his angels to take care of us, this gives us no privilege to neglect the ordinary means of safety; and that to do so, is *tempting God*.

Now this contains a lesson both of great importance and extent; since not only every Christian in the world is concerned in it, but almost every action of human life may, in some measure, take directions from it; for it teaches us, that in all concerns, whether of soul or body, we are bound to have recourse to the ordinary method appointed by God's Providence, for their preservation or improvement; and that whoever does otherwise, under pretence of depending upon extraordinary ways, incurs the guilt of that sin, which in scripture-language is called *tempting God*: A sin, which perhaps of all sins in the world, is most practised, and least understood: The subject then of this discourse shall

shall be to mark out some of the most general faults, whereby men become guilty of it.

There are numberless ways of *tempting God*, by a culpable neglect either of soul or body; for since his Providence has charged us with the care of both, we cannot satisfy this obligation, unless we shew a reasonable solicitude in providing for the good and welfare both of the one and the other: However, since the care of the body is a duty, which men are generally more apt to overstrain than neglect, I shall confine my discourse to such sinful neglects only as regard the soul.

First, then all those stand charged with the guilt of *tempting God*, who are remarkably negligent in the duty of prayer: The reason is, because prayer is a general remedy against sin, and a general means to obtain whatever helps we stand in need of: It is the channel through which all blessings from above are conveyed: It is the key that gives us access to the treasures of Heaven: It is our sword and buckler in the day of battle, and our security in the time of peace: Finally, it is our strongest defence against sin, the best support of virtue, and the daily food and refreshment of our souls; which therefore can no more maintain their spiritual life without it, than the body can subsist without a competency of nourishment and rest.

And are not they then who neglect this holy exercise, justly charged with the guilt of *tempting God*? For is it not evident, that they are either bent upon their own eternal ruin, or have presumption enough to expect that God will assist them with his holy grace, notwithstanding their wilful neglect of what *Christ* himself has expressly appointed, as a means to obtain it: *Ask*, [says *Christ*) and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall

shall find ; knock and it shall be opened to you. But these slothful Christians will needs receive without asking, and have Heaven opened to them without being at the trouble of knocking : But they speed, for the most part accordingly ; for as they ask not, so they receive not ! and thus their weakness encreasing daily more and more upon them, and God forsaking them in the day of battle, they fall of course a sacrifice to the malice of their enemies.

Secondly, All those are guilty of *tempting God*, who enter upon any state of life without first endeavouring to secure to themselves the favour and assistance of Heaven, by using all Christian means to dispose themselves for it : The reason is, because there is no state of life, whether public or private, secular or ecclesiastic, solitary or in society, but has so many difficulties to struggle with, and duties to practice, that whatever choice men make, unless God gives a blessing to it, nothing can be expected, but a long train of miscarriages in this life, and endless miseries hereafter.

And how is this blessing to be procured, but by the use of such means as God has appointed ? For if they consult his holy will, with an unfeigned sincerity of heart ; if they implore his aid with humble and hearty prayers ; if they do nothing without the advice of persons fit to be consulted, in a business of that moment ; finally, if they lay aside all motives suggested by corrupt nature, and aim chiefly at God's honour, and the saving of their souls ; such preparatory dispositions as these cannot fail of engaging Heaven, both to direct them in the choice of their state, and assist them in discharging all the duties of it.

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But, alas! how few take this method, or even do any thing that comes near to it? Let but the customary way of persons entering into the bonds of wedlock be an instance of it: For how is it young persons usually proceed in this important undertaking? Do they make it their chief concern to discover and obey the will of God? Is the prospect of most likely securing in that way their eternal interest, the principal motives that determines them to it? Is every thing done regularly, and with a due regard both to decency and the established laws of the Church? Finally, is care taken that the blessing of their Heavenly Father, and a large portion of his holy grace, without which they cannot be truly happy, be not wanting?

Nothing less than all this: For, *first*, as to the motive that determines them in their choice, 'tis for the most part purely human; their thoughts being either wholly confined to wordly considerations, or aiming no farther than to gratify a present inclination. Hence the concerns of the other world are usually left to take their chance; and the will of God, which should have been consulted in the first place, is either passed by wholly unregarded, or only made use of as a cover to interest, or other motives: For though his holy will be many times pretended, it is, in effect, the will of flesh and blood, has the whole management of the undertaking; as is very evident, particularly in their case, who, purposely declining the advice of parents or friends, carry things on with an affected secrecy, engage themselves hand over head by private contracts, and the better to prosecute their under-hand designs, stick not to tell a thousand studied lies, backed many times with oaths and execrations, to deceive those that might advise them,

them, or inform them of the will of God, if they had a mind to know it. But this is not their business; if the present passion be but satisfied, 'tis all they aim at: And what can it avail them after this to make some application to God, when the whole business is in effect concluded without him, and carried on so far, that there is no going back without violence to justice and the laws of God? For can they think he will give a blessing to a work thus rashly undertaken, or by an after-approbation become an abettor of their irregularities?

And therefore they reap, for the most part, as they have sowed; and their usual portion is a long train of insuperable difficulties and sorrows, endless disputes and brawls, and what is worst of all, a fruitless repentance: which usually ending in mutual aversions, not only makes their lives a hell upon earth, but endangers their being unhappy in the life to come: For, truly, 'tis no wonder they should prosper no better, when having, by their rash and indiscreet engagement, justly forfeited the blessing of their Heavenly Father, and the proper grace of the sacrament of marriage, they neither have virtue to discharge their duties, nor strength to bear the difficulties of their state; and so they sink of course under the weight of their burden.

And are not those then manifestly guilty of *tempting God*, who, instead of doing their best to put themselves under his protection, are violently hurried on by interest or passion, to bind themselves into an engagement of the greatest concern? There can be no doubt of it; since in so doing they must have the presumption to expect that God will favour them with his holy grace; whether they use any endeavours to obtain

tain it or not; which is wilfully neglecting the ordinary means appointed, and withdrawing themselves from the order established by him.

Thirdly, all those *tempt God* in a very notorious manner, who continue in their sins, in hopes of repenting in their last sickness: The reason is, because a sinful life being the direct road to everlasting perdition, to hope that such a life will terminate in a happy death, is to expect to go to Heaven by walking on boldly in the way that leads directly to Hell; and what is this but a most extravagant presumption? Since all the grounds those men can have to hope for salvation, is a vain confidence the devil inspires them with, that though they run on in a course of wilful sins, as long as life and health will permit, God will, notwithstanding, have compassion on them in their last distress, and by the power of an extraordinary grace, rescue them from the jaws of Hell just in the nick of time.

It is true, I cannot deny but such a thing may possibly happen, as it did in the case of the penitent thief: But since this must be the effect of an extraordinary grace, as I have fully proved in a former discourse, it follows, without dispute, that to depend positively upon it, and even to lay a design of living on in sin, is the same extravagant presumption as to expect, that God will shew the greatest favour to those that deserve it least, and be the most indulgent to the most impudent sinners.

Some will perhaps ask, why sinners may not as easily repent in their last sickness, as at any other time? Nay, why a death-bed conversion may not be depended on even with a greater security than any other; since men, in all likelihood,

lihood, are never more in earnest, than when they have death immediately before their eyes? I answer, *first*, that this way of arguing might have some force, if either any sinner could repent, without the help of God's grace, or the most impudent of sinners, such as have put off their conversion to the very last, could be saved without the assistance of an extraordinary grace.

I answer, *secondly*, that if a mere *servile fear* of hell-fire sufficed to reconcile a sinner to God, a death-bed repentance might afford security enough to one that has the use of reason to the last: For I can easily conceive, that a person, who has lived wickedly, should be seized with the greatest terror at the approach of death, and protest sincerely that he repents of his sins past, for fear of the punishment they justly deserve; as a man led to execution, is sorry for having been a murderer or a thief: But since a true conversion implies a detestation of sin precisely for its own sake, and as it is an offence of God, which is a very different motive from the former, I cannot easily conceive that a person, who has despised God, and loved sin for many years together, should all on a sudden love the one and hate the other sincerely, at a time when he is in no condition to employ the ordinary means appointed by God, to work this happy change in his soul.

Now this marks out the difference between a sinner in perfect health, and one reduced to the last extremity: For whilst he is in perfect health, whatever his condition may be, he has opportunity and leisure to work himself out of it by insensible degrees: He has time to pray, and read, and meditate, and perform all those exercises, which are the natural and usual means

God's grace makes use of to change a sinner's heart, and soften it into compunction : And in all this there appears nothing extraordinary, but every thing is done according to the regular method, appointed by the divine mercy for the recovery of a sinner, though ever so deeply engaged in the habits of sin.

But when such a one is reduced to his last sickness, the case is quite altered ; because having sinned as long as he could, and thereby both strengthened his enemy, and weakened himself to the utmost degree ; and, to complete his misfortune, having now neither leisure nor opportunity, nor the ease of mind or body, requisite to perform those exercises that should gradually work him into a better disposition, he is, by consequence, under all the disadvantages imaginable of contributing any thing towards his obtaining from Almighty God, the powerful assistance he stands so highly in need of, and which alone can rescue him from everlasting ruin : And therefore when I consider all the particulars of his unhappy state, *viz.* his soul disordered with sinful passions, his heart accustomed to resist the inspirations of grace, his mind disturbed with excessive fears, such as the near approach of judgment and eternity must needs cause in one, that has always lived an enemy to God ; and, finally, his body racked with variety of pains, and labouring under a mortal anguish : When, I say, I consider all these things, I cannot but look upon him as one on the brink of eternal ruin, unless an extraordinary grace comes in to his assistance : And I leave any one to judge, whether living on in sin, in hopes of being favoured with this extraordinary mercy, be not an extravagant presumption, and the very height of *tempting God?*

God? Truly, I cannot judge otherwise of it; nor can I but fear, that those, who thus pretend to play tricks with God, and get Heaven by a cheat, notwithstanding the fair shew of repentance, many of them make in their last sickness (which ignorant people call *dying well*;) I cannot but fear, I say, that they generally die as they lived, and receive the just reward of their presumption, in finding themselves disappointed of the mercy they have so long abused.

Fourthly, and lastly, all those are guilty of *tempting God*, who either continue wilfully in the immediate occasion of sin, or at any time expose themselves to it without any necessity: The reason hereof is plain and obvious, because God has positively commanded us to *fly from sin as from the face of a serpent*; and to oblige us more strictly to it, has expressly forewarned us, that *whoever loves danger shall perish in it*. Now he that puts himself wilfully into the occasion of sin, shews plainly that he loves danger, and is fond of being tempted; because occasion alone is so dangerous a temptation, even to persons virtuously inclined, that saints themselves have sometimes experienced the fatal power of it; and 'tis no *hyperbole* to say, that occasion alone has murdered more souls than all the plagues, wars, and famines have destroyed bodies; and therefore whoever exposes himself wilfully to danger, will soon experience the fatal consequence of his presumption, in finding himself plunged into all the disorders of an unruly passion; for God has never promised his assistance to those, that neglect the ordinary means appointed by him for their security: And since he has positively commanded us to fly from sin, and shun the occasions of

it; what can such presumptuous souls, as despise his holy ordinance, and will needs be trying tricks, and venturing farther than they ought; what can they, I say, expect but to meet their ruin in the temptation they have sought? Nor can they then, with justice, complain of their being tempted above their strength, since, in such cases, they are their own tempters, and the wilful authors of the mischief that befalls them.

Thus we see how many ways we may *tempt God*: And it appears plainly, from what has been said, that pride is the ordinary root of this sin; that is, either too great a conceit of our own strength, or a presumptuous confidence in the goodness and mercies of God. Hence persons, that are truly humble, have a great horror of *tempting God* in any kind: for the humble Christian being always distrustful of himself, and knowing that all his strength must come from above, is afraid to neglect any of the means ordained by Almighty God for the better securing of his soul's salvation: This keeps him faithful to all his duties, and particularly to the duty of prayer, because he knows all heavenly grace flows through that channel: This also makes him fearful to undertake any business of moment, or engage himself in any course of life, without first having recourse to the Father of lights, and employing all endeavours possible to procure his blessing.

This again makes him tremble at the very thought of forfeiting God's grace; and if, through human weakness, he finds himself fallen under his displeasure, he loses no time, but turns his thoughts immediately towards the usual remedies prescribed in that case: So far is he from resolving to put things upon the last hazard,

hazard, or pretending to make a sinful life the way to a happy death. This, finally, makes him set a continual guard upon his senses, avoid the dangerous liberties of the world, keep at the greatest distance possible from all occasions of sin, and decline whatever may inflame his passions, or give his enemy an advantage over him.

Grant us, O God, this humble disposition ; that being truly sensible of our dependence on thee, we may be ever faithful in performing whatever thou requirest of us. We know thou never forsakest any, but such as first abandon thee ; and 'tis but just that they, who despise the order of thy infinite wisdom, should forfeit their share in the protection of thy almighty power. However, forgive us our past failings, and withdraw not thy mercies from us, as our sins have justly deserved ; but compassionating our weakness, enable us with thy holy grace to be more faithful to thee hereafter.

THE FORTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE BLIND BEGGAR.

A certain blind man sat down by the way-side begging. Luke xviii. 35.

THE Evangelist gives us a relation of the miraculous cure of a blind beggar, who sitting by the way-side, and hearing a great throng of people passing by, asked what it meant, and being told that *Jesus of Nazareth was passing by*, cried out to him, *Jesus, son of David have mercy on me*. Whereupon our Saviour stopped, and ordering him to be brought to him, asked him
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what he desired of him: He answered, *Lord, that I may see*: Which our Saviour, according to his usual goodness, immediately granted, telling him, that the recovery of his sight was the reward of his *faith*. Whereupon he immediately saw, and *followed Jesus, praising and glorifying God*. This is the historical account of this miraculous cure: Now as the corporeal blindness of this beggar is a figure of the spiritual blindness of a sinful soul deprived of the sight of grace, so the method he took to recover his sight, and his behaviour after he had received that blessing, contain many instructive lessons for those, who are yet labouring under the blindness of some violent inclination, or habit of sin: The deep sense he had of this unhappy condition; the pressing desire he shewed to be delivered from it; his watchfulness in laying hold of the favourable opportunity that offered itself; the earnestness and perseverance of his prayer, notwithstanding the rebukes he met with; and, finally, his hearty confidence in *Jesus Christ*, are the lessons a sinner must practise, after him, in order to obtain his cure. And when his heavenly physician has bestowed this blessing on him, then he must also imitate the grateful behaviour of this beggar, in following *Jesus Christ*, and *glorifying God* for so signal a mercy. But I shall now confine myself to the first part of the pattern we have before us; and only mark out from it, what a sinner must do in order to obtain the perfect cure of his soul; which shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

The first thing to be remarked in the blind beggar, mentioned in the gospel, is the deep sense he had of his unhappy condition in the want of sight; which went so far as even to
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make him forget, or wholly overlook his other necessities, though otherwise very pressing upon him. For, notwithstanding his extreme poverty, which even obliged him to beg his bread by the way side ; when he was informed that *Jesus of Nazareth* was passing by, attended by a great throng of people, instead of managing so favourable an occasion for the getting some alms, he utterly forgot his nakedness and hunger, and made his whole application to *Christ* for the recovery of his sight : Whence it plainly appears, that he regarded his blindness as the greatest evil and pressure of his life, and his greatest interest to be delivered from it ; because whatever is preferred in practice, is a man's greatest interest, and lies nearest to his heart.

Here then is marked out, the first disposition necessary to prepare a sinner for his cure ; and indeed the ground-work of all the rest : For whoever is under the tyranny of any sinful passion, is utterly incapable of being delivered from it, till he be so far sensible of his condition, as both to know and own himself to be unhappy. The reason is clear, because all the distempers of the soul being voluntary, nothing but a sincere will, and hearty desire to be delivered from an evil, till he regards it as an evil, and is sensible of his being unhappy under it ; it follows, that unless Almighty God be pleased to open a sinner's eyes, at least so far as to let him see the danger and unhappiness of his state, there is no hope of his cure ; all remedies are ineffectual ; the very best advice and most pressing remonstrances are wholly lost upon him : But when he once begins to be uneasy, and groan under the weight of his sinful inclinations, Oh ! then there is hope of him ; because this
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feeling sense of his condition is itself a good step towards his cure.

He must therefore look upon the sinful state of his soul, as the greatest evil that could have happened to him ; nay, he must regard it as a sovereign evil, and his deliverance from it as the sovereign and most desirable good of his life : For then all worldly concerns will give way to the interest of his soul's salvation. His chief business will be to study and employ the proper means to compass this great end ; and though perhaps many other concerns will call upon him, yet nothing will be able to take him off from those of his soul ; because he will be convinced, that it is the most important thing he has to do in this world ; which therefore ought to have the first place in his heart, and be followed with the greatest application.

As therefore the sense of this unhappy state, is the first disposition towards his deliverance from it, so its first fruit will be, to inspire him with an hearty and eager desire of it : For no man can naturally be sensible of a great evil, but he must be desirous to remove it from him ; and when this desire is once fixed in the heart, all endeavours towards it will follow of course. This appears plainly in the conduct of the children of this world ; who as they are usually eager in their desires, so are they proportionably eager in their pursuits. A person, for example, that has a considerable fortune in view, takes all the pains and precautions possible to gain his point : He makes his court to those, who he thinks may promote his interest, though otherwise inferior to him : He watches all opportunities that favour his design, and is careful to prevent or remove all obstacles that may obstruct it. In a word, we may observe in him
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an unwearied application, and every thing he says or does tending directly to the end he has in view : And how comes this ? Because his heart is set upon it, and the eagerness of his pursuit, is but the natural fruit of the eagerness of his desires.

In like manner therefore, when a sinner once takes his salvation to heart ; when he has an earnest desire of it, as the blind beggar had of receiving sight, there is nothing he will not do to succeed in a concern of that importance : This desire will set all the powers of his soul at work, in order to know and obey the will of God in every thing that is necessary for his deliverance, from the unhappy state into which he is fallen : But above all, he will be watchful not to let slip the favourable opportunity of *Jesus passing by* ; but lay fast hold of it, and improve it, to his best advantage, as the blind man did ; which contains a moral of great instruction : For if this poor man had not been upon the watch, but let *Jesus* pass by without applying himself to him, perhaps the same occasion had never offered itself again ; and so he would have continued blind as he was, to his very death.

This certainly happens in a spiritual manner to many sinners ; who neglecting the precious moments that are sometimes offered them by the Father of mercies, have ever after continued in their sinful state : For which reason the prophet *Isaiah* exhorts us, *to seek the Lord when he may be found, and to call upon him when he is near* : And our Saviour himself, weeping over the city of *Jerusalem*, attributes its reprobation, to its neglect of the mercy he offered it in that very hour : *For if thou hadst but known (says Christ) even in this thy day, the things which are conducing*

to thy peace : But they are now hidden from thy eyes. And then he pronounced those words, which contain the prophecy of its utter destruction.

A sinner therefore must be watchful to observe the happy moments, when *Jesus of Nazareth is passing by*. And what are those, but when he finds himself feelingly touched with some holy inspiration, which is but a *passing grace*: For it comes and goes, like a sudden ray of light darted upon the soul : And therefore, if he has not his heart ready open to receive it, and make his best advantage of it ; if he lets *Jesus pass by*, without managing so favourable an occasion, for the benefit of his soul's salvation, who knows when he will return again that way ? The most proper time then, to make his application to his Saviour and Redeemer, is when he finds him approaching near him, and, as it were, calling upon him by the interior motions of his holy grace : It is then he must pour forth his soul before him, with the most ardent sighs, of a heart pierced with grief for his past offences : It is then he must send up to Heaven such fervent prayers, as are a kind of violence to the bowels of infinite mercy : It is then, in fine, he must cry out with all force, *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me*.

This was the blind man's prayer, when he was informed that *Jesus of Nazareth* was passing by. But what happened to him upon it ? *They who went before rebuked him to make him hold his peace*. But he, instead of being discouraged at it, cried out much louder than before, *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me*. And so must a sinner do, who seriously resolves to save his soul. If the world, like those, who rebuked the poor blindman for crying so loud, and would
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needs have imposed silence on him; if the world, I say, offended with his zeal and fervour, clamours against him, and with its censures, raileries, and persecutions endeavours to dishearten him from prosecuting his pious design, he must not be at all surpris'd to meet with trials of this nature; since the Holy Ghost has forewarned us, by the pen of St. Paul, that *whoever will live godly in Christ, shall suffer persecution*: For the world will ever hate those, that abandon it to come over to *Christ*: It will load them with the heaviest censures, and give a malicious turn to every thing they do. Their devotions shall pass for hypocrisy; their sobriety for affectation, their retirement from company for the effects of moroseness, or a vanity to appear singular. In a word, nothing will escape its malice; and the most Christian practices, will only afford matter for merriment and laughter. So that whoever will effectually compass his desired cure, must raise his heart above whatever the world will say of him: For if he be concerned at it, the uneasiness it will give him, will so embitter the most necessary remedies, as will render them utterly impracticable to him.

But let us now suppose the world should prove better natured than usual, and give him no molestation; yet he must expect a terrible and lasting war with himself: His old bosom friends, I mean his old habits and passions, will rise furiously against him, and with repeated assaults and violent sollicitations, endeavour to oblige him to yield up his cause, and desist from any longer importuning Heaven for his cure. But what must he do in this so difficult a conflict? when his enemies press hard upon him on the one hand, and Almighty God, his
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only refuge, seems perhaps to take no notice of him on the other? Must he lay down his arms of prayer and mortification? Must he forbear crying out to *Jesus* for mercy? Oh! no, by no means; he must do as the beggar did, who being rebuked by the multitude for crying so loud, and bid to hold his peace, raised his voice much higher, and cried out louder than before, *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me*: So must a sinner do, who resolves to make himself heard: He must redouble his cries and prayers, as his enemies redouble their assaults upon him: He must raise his voice much higher, and cry out louder than before for mercy: If his passions continue obstinate in soliciting him to sin, he must be as obstinate in soliciting *Jesus* to have mercy on him; if they be unwearied in seeking his ruin, he must be as unwearied in imploring the Divine assistance to destroy them.

The devil will indeed do all he can to silence him, and make him believe his case is desperate, and that it is in vain to cry out any longer for mercy: But let him take it for a certain truth, that the life, health, and salvation of his soul depends upon his unwearied perseverance in prayer; I mean, not a drowsy, negligent, and slothful prayer, in which the heart has little or no share, but such a prayer as the blind beggar has set us a copy of; a prayer, proceeding from the pressing desire of the heart, and in which the soul speaks much louder than the tongue; for whoever is perseverant in daily sending up such prayers to Heaven, ought to have a hearty confidence to see them in due time blessed with success: And if Almighty God seems for some time to have no regard to them, as *Christ* seemed at first to take no notice of the beggar, it is only to oblige him, by this seem-

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ing refusal, to redouble his fervour, and cry out louder than before; because this importunity in asking is as acceptable to God, as it is usually displeasing to men: Heaven is to be gained by violence, and it is the violence of an unwearied perseverance in prayer must do the work.

But then care must be taken, that it be attended with that other disposition, which, as our Saviour himself has intimated, gave the finishing stroke to the efficacy of the blind beggar's prayer; I mean, a hearty confidence in the goodness and power of *Jesus Christ*: For our Saviour having ordered him to be brought before him, and asked him what he desired, he answered, *Lord, that I may receive sight*: He neither doubted of his power nor good-will; but being fully assured of both, he confidently presented his petition to him, which our Saviour immediately granted; saying, *Receive sight, thy faith has made thee whole*. The true secret, therefore, to obtain the cure of all our spiritual distempers, is to ask it with a hearty confidence in the grace and mercies of our redeemer; as, on the contrary, one reason why our prayers prove often ineffectual, is because they are not attended with this holy disposition; for instead of placing all our trust in God, and making our addresses to him with an unshaken faith, and entire dependance on him, we either have a secret confidence in our own strength and industry, or a diffidence of his goodness, or the power of his grace.

It is true, if a sinner considers nothing but himself, the number and enormity of his sins past, and the present difficulties he has to struggle with, afford matter for such melancholy reflections, as suffice to make him despond: But
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when he turns his eyes towards *Jesus Christ*, his Saviour and Redeemer, and considers him as an inexhaustible source of mercy, and vested with a power equal to his goodness, does he not then discover such solid grounds of hope, as will not only remove all diffidence and mistrust, but even encourage him to present his petitions with the most assured confidence of success? For may he not then justly reason thus with himself: It is true my sins are very great, but the mercies of my Redeemer are yet infinitely greater: My wounds are dangerous, but nothing is incurable to the hand of an omnipotent physician: Did he not come into the world to save sinners? My being then a sinner, ought not to discourage me from hoping for a share in the blessings he came to bestow: Take courage then my soul; what reason hast thou to despair, unless it be of thy own strength? For thou can'st do nothing of thyself; but despair not of his power or mercy, who is infinite in both. With these considerations, I say, a sinner must encourage himself to approach with confidence to the throne of grace; and there continue to cry out for mercy, until the Divine goodness, moved with his earnest prayer, speaks to his soul what *Christ* said to the blind man, *Thy faith hath made thee sound*.

But when this happy hour is come, and that, by God's blessing, he now finds a hatred to sin deeply fixed in his heart, his passions subdued so far as to be master of them, and himself walking steadily in the observance of God's holy law, which are the true symptoms of a sincere conversion, he must then follow his guide, a few steps farther, and also imitate the grateful behaviour of the beggar, after the recovery of his

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his sight: Which shall be the subject of the following entertainment.

THE FORTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE BEGGAR'S GRATITUDE TO CHRIST FOR HIS CURE.

And immediately he received sight, and followed him, and glorified God. Luke xviii. 43.

IN my last discourse, I drew some moral instructions from the blind beggar's behaviour, whereby he moved *Christ* to have compassion on him; and from the method he took to obtain that blessing, I marked out the most considerable steps, by which a sinner must approach the throne of mercy, in order to obtain the grace of a perfect conversion, and the cure of his soul: But the gratitude of this poor beggar, set forth by the evangelist, in the praises he paid to God for the blessing he had received, and immediately *following Christ*, is so instructive a lesson for all sinners now delivered by God's grace, from their former spiritual blindness, that I intend to make it the whole subject of this discourse.

The gospel then tells us, that as soon as the blind man had received sight, he immediately *followed Christ, praising and glorifying God*; he was so transported with the deep sense of the favour he had received, that he could neither think nor speak of any thing else: He expressed his gratitude by words, *in praising and glorifying God*; and he shewed it in his actions, by immediately *following Christ*; and we cannot doubt, but he proclaimed every where the praises
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of his benefactor, and retained as long as he lived a grateful remembrance of the blessing he had bestowed upon him.

It is certain, that to praise and glorify God for benefits received, is so essential and indispensable a duty, that God demands it of us, as a tribute due to him for all blessings whatsoever, whether spiritual or temporal: This appears plainly in St. *Luke's* relation of the *ten lepers* cured by *Christ*, and sent to shew themselves to the priest, as it was commanded by the law of *Moses*: However, though they were all cured, but one of the ten returned to glorify God, and pay his acknowledgments to the visible author of his cure: But hear how severely *Christ* censured the ingratitude of the other nine, in the following words: *Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There was not found that returned to give glory to God, but only this one stranger.* Whence it is manifest, that those *nine lepers* were wanting to a duty which God required of them, and that our Saviour was highly offended at it.

Ingratitude is certainly a vice odious both to God and man: For no man bestows a favour, but expects at least the return of a grateful heart, when no other can be made: And this debt is always exacted the most rigorously, because every man has it in his power to pay it, nay, the most generous and disinterested souls are apt to resent a neglect of it, because, it being the only reward they look for from men, if they be robbed of it, they lose the whole fruit of their generosity in this world. Now if this be so betwixt man and man, how much more justly must Almighty God, whose bounty to his creatures is infinite, be offended at the sin of ingratitude; since it robs him not only of the
glory

glory due to him, and of which he is most jealous, but of the hearts of his creatures, which he claims as his peculiar right? It is for this reason that ingratitude is represented by spiritual writers as a sin, that particularly provokes God to draw back his liberal hand, and obstructs the overflowings of his bounties upon his creatures: Whereas a heart mindful of favours received, and truly grateful for them, draws down a continual profusion of fresh blessings on the soul; and every act of praise and thanksgiving offered to God, is not only accepted by him in part of payment of the debt we owe him, but as a merit that moves him to repeat and continue his former liberality towards us.

But to give you a remarkable instance how acceptable this tribute of a grateful heart is to Almighty God, and how exact he is in demanding it for all blessings, both spiritual and temporal: We read in the Old Testament, that he expressly commanded *Moses* to institute several solemn feasts to be kept yearly, in memory of the most signal favours he had bestowed upon his people, as their delivery from the *Egyptian bondage*, their miraculous passage through the *Red Sea*; his giving them the law upon *Mount Sinai*; and feeding them with *manna* in the desert; some of which miraculous food was also kept in the ark to be a lasting memorial of that favour. Now all the ceremonies to be performed on those solemn days, were exactly set down in the law of *Moses*, according to the directions he had received from God himself on the Mount; and the principal drift of them was, to renew yearly in the people's mind, the remembrance of the favours they received upon those days, and excite them to a grateful sense and acknowledgment

ledgment of them : Sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered and canticles were sung to praise and glorify God, the author of those blessings : And lest the meaning of those ceremonies should ever be forgot, *Moses* expressly commands all parents to explain them to their children ; that so not only the ceremonies themselves, but also the meaning of them might be transmitted down from father to son, throughout all succeeding ages. *When thy son* (says he) *shall ask thee in time to come, saying, What mean these laws, these ceremonies and rites, which the Lord our God has commanded us ? Thou shalt say unto him, We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt, with a mighty hand—and therefore the Lord has commanded us to observe these laws and ceremonies.* Deut. vi. 20.

Thus you see the care God took to perpetuate the memory of his benefits, by commanding it to be handed down from generation to generation : And for what other end, than to perpetuate thereby the gratitude of his people, and make them sensible, that, besides a lasting grateful heart, he expected them over and above, an annual tribute of solemn praise and thanksgiving for past favours ? Nay, has not the Church the same end in view in all the solemn feasts of the new law, those of *Christmas, Easter, Pentecost*, and the feast of *Corpus Christi* ? Are they not all ordained to refresh in our minds the remembrance of some signal blessing bestowed by God upon his Church, and thereby to warm our hearts into a sense of gratitude to the author of those blessings ? And what are the feasts of *martyrs* and *confessors*, but days of public thanksgiving to God for their victories and triumphs, obtained through the power of his holy grace ? So that the most solemn institutions, both of the
Old

Old Testament and Church of *Christ*, agree in this, that they all tend to inspire us with a grateful sense of God's benefits, and convince us that gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving, are duties which God requires of us.

Now then, to return to the particular case of a sinner delivered from the bondage of sin, by the power and efficacy of God's holy grace; such a one must look upon himself, so highly indebted to the divine goodness for this signal mercy, that he ought to retain a grateful remembrance of it as long as he lives: For whether he considers the value of the benefit itself, without which he would have been lost for ever; or his own unworthiness of it, in having so often provoked Almighty God to withdraw his mercies from him; or the unwearied patience of his deliverer, in having forborn so long with him; or, finally, the multitudes of those who are never favoured with it, but are justly permitted to live and die in their sins; every one of these circumstances lays an obligation of gratitude upon him, and renders a forgetfulness of it criminal in the sight of God.

Nor is this the only motive he has to induce him to it, but his perseverance in the grace to which he is restored depends in a great measure upon it: For as the grace of his conversion was a gratuitous gift of God, so his perseverance in it, must be owing to a continuation of the same merciful bounty towards him; since it is an undoubted truth, that if the hand which healed him, be not always ready to support him, he will most certainly fall back into his former unhappy state; so that it is his interest, as well as duty, to do his utmost to prevail with God, not to withdraw from him the merciful hand, to which he owes his cure: And since there is no-
thing

thing more effectual to draw down this blessing on him, than a lasting, grateful sense of the favour already received; his care must be to fix it deeply in his heart, to make it the daily subject of his thanksgiving, and never leave off praising and glorifying God, with all the powers of his soul. It is true, there are many penitential duties, from which a penitent may be justly exempted, as being inconsistent with his circumstances: For if he be poor, he cannot give alms; if sickly, he cannot fast, nor practise any other mortifications, which perhaps, would otherwise be proper; nor can he spend so much time in prayer as would be required, if the necessary duties of a lawful calling will not allow of it: All these then, will sometimes admit of a dispensation; but the duty of gratitude admits of none; no pretence can exempt him from it; neither poverty, nor sickness, nor employments, are any hindrance to it, but rather furnish him with so many different occasions of practising this advice of *St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, chap. v. 18. *Give thanks in all things; for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ.* So that when gratitude is thoroughly fixed in the heart of a penitent, it is as a perpetual sacrifice; it is a fire that never ceases to burn, what way soever the head or hands are employed; because the heart is equally free under all circumstances or engagements of the body.

Oh! how truly sensible was the royal penitent of this important duty, when he cried out, *Lord, thou hast broken my chains; to thee I will offer up a sacrifice of praise!* How was his heart inflamed, when he made this solemn declaration: *I will never cease to sing the mercies of the Lord?* With what feeling sense of gratitude did he breathe forth these pious words: *Bless the Lord,*

Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me blefs his holy name: Blefs the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his favours; who forgives all thy iniquities; who heals all thy weaknesſes; who redeems thy life from deſtruction; who crowns thee with loving kindneſs and tender mercy! Pſal. cii. Thus ſpoke the royal penitent; and 'tis plain, his very ſoul ſpoke in thoſe words, 'tis plain thoſe inflamed rhapsodies iſſued forth from the violent fire of love and gratitude burning in his ſoul, and were but the effuſions and overflowings of a heart, filled with the great ideas of the mercies he had received, and unable to contain itſelf: And, truly, we never read of any celebrated penitent or convert, but his gratitude to God for the mercy of his cur^y, had not a remarkable part in the hiſtory of his life.

I will only mention one example, *viz.* that of *St. Mary Magdalene*, whoſe gratitude to *Chriſt* appears in every action and circumſtance of her life, after her converſion: For from that moment ſhe conceived ſo great a love for him, that her whole delight and ſatiſfaction was to be near his ſacred perſon: She ſeemed to make it her glory to ſet off the triumph of her conqueror, by ſeeking all public occaſions to pay her attendance on him: That action of her pouring a precious ointment upon him, is commended by *Chriſt* himſelf, and by divine inſpiration recorded in holy writ, to ſerve as an everlaſting monument of her gratitude to him: She followed him in his great diſtreſs, even when he was forſaken by his diſciples: She expoſed herſelf to the inſults of the brutal ſoldiers, in meeting him with weeping eyes when he was carrying his Croſs, and ſtanding by him whiſt he hung upon it: She was up early in the morning to ſeek her dear Lord, and came with ſpices

spices and perfumes to embalm his body, without fear of the guards that were set to watch it; and not finding it in the sepulchre, she paid him what she could, the tribute of her tears: But when she could no longer enjoy the visible presence of the person who possessed her whole heart, she retired into a desert, sequestered from all human society, lest any thing of this world should divert her thoughts from the only object that could give her any comfort or satisfaction.

Here we have, in the behaviour of a holy penitent, a perfect pattern of gratitude, the chief subject whereof was the first grace of her conversion; for which she thought herself bound to consecrate the whole remainder of her life to the service of her merciful benefactor. This leads me to the last instruction marked out, in the behaviour of the poor blind beggar after his cure: For as soon as he had received sight, he immediately *followed Christ*, and by that professed himself to be one of his disciples. And so will a sinner truly converted do: He will follow *Christ* in the imitation of his virtues, and practice of all christian duties that are suitable to his state. If he be poor he will imitate the patience and humility of *Christ*, in submitting cheerfully to the hardships incident to that condition: if he has a family to provide for by his industry and labour, he will do it in the spirit of penance, and take for his pattern the painful and laborious life of *Christ*: If he be blessed with plenty, he will imitate his goodness, charity, and mercy, in relieving the distressed, and encourage himself to it by remembering these maxims of the gospel; that *what is done to the poor is done to Christ himself*; that *the merciful shall obtain mercy*; that *in what measure we shall*
measure

measure out to others, in the same it shall be measured out to us : Finally, that alms given to the poor, is but money deposited in their hands, to purchase for him a treasure in the kingdom of Heaven.

He will also remember, that his condition is much like to that of a person newly recovered of some very great sickness; who is therefore obliged to continue a regular diet and exercise, for fear of a relapse. And this will determine him to a uniform practice of devotion, and a Christian manner of employing his time : It will convince him of the necessity of daily prayer; of having frequently recourse to the fountains of grace, and nourishing his devotion, with reading of good books : For whoever proposes to himself the exact observance of God's holy law, and takes it seriously to heart, as a condition necessary to salvation, will, of course be solicitous to inform himself of the means in order to it: And therefore when he finds, upon enquiry, that prayer and the sacraments are the most powerful means to attain to this great end, as being ordained by *Christ* himself, he will infallibly conclude, that he cannot pretend to be in earnest, if he either lays aside those means, or is notoriously negligent in the use of them.

Lastly, he will be convinced that he has an obligation, over and above what many others have, to be always a faithful servant and follower of *Christ*, by reason of his past sins : For he has been a rebel against him, and by his bad example has perhaps drawn others into the same guilt. What other compensation then can he make him, for having graciously received him into favour after the many treasons committed against him, than to do what he can to repair

repair the scandals of his life past, and promote the interest of so merciful a sovereign, by appearing now as resolute and zealous in his service, as he was before an enemy to it: He ought therefore never to lose the remembrance of past sins, but keep them always in view, as the royal prophet did; to serve him as a spur to excite him to a more than ordinary zeal and fervour, in every thing relating to God's service; the effect whereof will be, to edify his neighbour as much now by his sober, regular, and Christian behaviour, as he dis-edified him before by his irregularities and disorders. Thus will he become a true and faithful follower of *Christ*, a disciple worthy of so good a master, an imitator of him in this life, and a partaker of his eternal crown hereafter.

THE FORTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

IT IS OUR DUTY TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES.

Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you.

Mat. v. 44.

THESE words being precise and clear, admit of no interpretation in favour of corrupt nature; which, if it pretends to plead for itself, by alledging the impossibility of loving an enemy, St. *Jerome* has already answered it, in his comment upon this very text, saying, *that the things commanded by Christ, are perfect indeed, but not impossible*: Which, in reference to the duty in question, he proves from the practice, *first*, of *David* returning good for evil to *Saul*, who thirsted after his blood; *2dly*, of St. *Stephen* praying for those that stoned him; *3dly*, of St. *Paul*

Paul wishing to be anathematized for the sake of his persecutors ; and lastly, from the example of *Christ* himself, whose practice as well as doctrine, as to what regards the duty of forgiving and loving our enemies, shall be the subject of this entertainment.

There is no duty in the whole gospel either inculcated with more frequent repetitions, or recommended by more illustrious examples, from the life and actions of our Saviour *Jesus Christ*, than of love and charity to our enemies : To make this evident let us first examine what he has taught relating to this subject : For whether we look into the first or last sermon preached by him, the one upon the mount, the other at his last supper, we shall find this doctrine so amply treated both in the one and the other, that there is no room to doubt but our Saviour's intention, in this beginning and ending his preaching with it, was to give his disciples both an early tincture, and lasting impression of it. And truly, considering what utter strangers the *Jews* were to the doctrine of pardoning injuries, and loving their enemies, it needed all the recommendation possible, to bring it into credit.

For the clearer understanding whereof you must know, that as in many other particulars, so in reference to brotherly love and charity, the *Jewish* doctors had very much corrupted the Mosaick law, by imposing their own interpretations and traditions, for law upon the people. As for instance ; the fifth commandment forbids murder, as a heinous crime, and it was punished with death : But, because the usual steps to it, as *anger*, *hatred*, *enmities*, and the like, were not forbid in express terms ; they concluded, that provided they but kept their hands free

from blood, the fore-mentioned passions might be entertained in their hearts, and expressed in words, without any breach of the commandment.

Now to condemn this abuse, and misinterpretation of God's law, our Saviour, in his sermon on the mount, delivers the following maxims, thus : *Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill ; but I say unto you, that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment ; and whoever shall say to his brother Racha, shall be in danger of the counsel ; but whoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.* Mat. v. 21. 22. And to express the hatred Almighty God has of enmities and quarrels, he proceeds in this manner : *Therefore if thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has any thing against thee : leave thy gift before the altar, go thy way, and be first reconciled to thy brother.* Matt. v. 24. Here you see Christ prefers the duty of charity before sacrifice ; which though it be the highest worship we can pay to God, yet we are positively commanded to forbear it, till the duty of charity to our neighbour be first fully satisfied.

The second corruption of the *Mosaick* law relating to this subject, and corrected by Christ, was this : The law was very severe in all cases of violence committed upon any one's person, and demanded *eye for eye, tooth for tooth*. Now this law of retaliation, was doubtless only intended as a rule to public ministers of justice to act by : But the *Jewish* doctors by their corrupt interpretations, had very much enlarged the meaning of it, and made it a rule not only for public justice, but private revenge in many cases. Wherefore to remedy this abuse, our Saviour

viour gave the following instructions: *You have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, But whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to, him the other also; and if any man will sue thee at law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; and whoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him two.* Matt. v. 38, 39, 40. These are the words of *Christ*; which are so far from allowing us to retaliate injuries, that they expressly direct us to encounter the malice of our enemies, only with the arms of patience; and to purchase peace and charity with our neighbour, even with the prejudice of our temporal interest or conveniences.

Lastly, the *Jews* had a current tradition amongst them, that they might lawfully hate their enemies. Because God having commanded them, in the 19th chapter of *Leviticus*, to love their friends and brethren, without laying any express command upon them relating to their enemies; the *Jewish* doctors, interpreting this law according to the inclinations of corrupt nature, concluded positively from it, that they might lawfully bear a hatred to their enemies, and do them any mischief, provided they kept within the law. And therefore *Christ*, to abolish this error, set the following rules, in contradiction to the corrupt tradition of the *Jews*. *Ye have heard that it has been said; Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy: But I say unto you; love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father, who is in Heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and on the good: and sendeth rain on the just*

and on the unjust ; for if you love them that love you, what reward have you ? and if ye salute your brethren only, what do you more than others ? do not even the publicans so ? Be therefore perfect, even as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Mat. v. 43, 44, &c.

Here our Saviour marks out clearly, both the *persons* in relation to whom, and the *manner* how the duty of charity is to be practised. As to the persons, to whom we owe this duty, they are particularly specified by *Christ*, viz. They that *hate, curse, slander, and persecute* us. In a word all those that are our professed enemies : And as to the manner how we must behave ourselves towards them ; our Saviour tells us, that we must *love* them, *do good* to them, *salute* them, that is, pay them all the customary duties of civility ; and finally, *pray* for them : And upon these terms promises to own us for the children of that Father, *who makes his sun rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust.*

Now who would not think but that *Christ* had here sufficiently declared himself upon this subject, both to shew the importance of it, and imprint a lasting remembrance of it in all men's hearts ? However, he resumes it again in the very next chapter, which is but a continuation of the same sermon : For having in this chapter taught that form of prayer, which is commonly called our Lord's prayer, he takes occasion to enlarge upon the fifth petition of it, and tells his disciples, *that if they forgive men their trespasses, their Heavenly Father will also forgive them : but if they forgive not men their trespasses, neither will their Heavenly Father forgive them. Mat. vi. 15.* And 'tis remarkable, that this is the only petition our Saviour thought fit to enlarge upon, and

and draw instructive consequences from; though he had already explained himself so fully on this subject, and the natural order of connection, led him rather to some reflections upon the concluding petition, than that which was interrupted by it, and separated from the following discourse.

Thus then, you see our Saviour's early care to instruct us in the duty of charity, by his repeating it so often in the very first sermon he ever preached. However since there is a certain time, in which men generally utter those things that are nearest to their hearts, and of which they desire to leave the deepest impressions, (the time I speak of is when they are upon the point of leaving this world; for then their words carry a particular weight, and their commands challenge the most religious observance,) this time our Saviour chose, to resume the subject he had already so often enlarged upon; intending doubtless thereby to give us to understand, that the commands he then laid upon us ought to be regarded as the last will and testament of our dying Lord and Master.

For 'twas at his last supper, and in his last sermon, perhaps an hour or two before the first scene of his passion; I mean his agony in the garden, when every word he spoke was like a fiery dart shot from an inflamed heart, and his sacred soul was burning with love and charity for his enemies; 'twas then, I say, he was pleased to deliver to us the precept of charity; which, to render it more solemn, he ushered in with this preparatory discourse: *My little children, I have yet a small time to be with you: Ye shall seek me, whither I go, ye cannot come, John* xiii. 33. Having rendered his apostles attentive with this surprising preamble, he proceeds thus:

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A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you. John xiii. 34. He calls it a new commandment, as being in a particular manner the precept of the *new law*, and the *manner* of his having loved, being also wholly *new*.

But who does not plainly see, that the motive of our Saviour's making choice of that time for the delivering of it, was to recommend and endear it to us? The very words of his preamble, give sufficient grounds for this reflection. *My little children, I have a small time to be with you.* As if he had said, I am now upon the point of parting from you; wherefore, if I may justly challenge any return of gratitude for all the favours you have already received, or hope still from me, I conjure you to lay up in your hearts this last will and command of your dying Father, *viz. That ye love one another, as I have loved you.* However, he repeats it soon after in terms still more pressing thus; *This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you.* John xv. 12. Here he calls it *his own commandment*, by way of excellency above all his other precepts; and so St. John the Evangelist, his faithful interpreter, was always wont to call it; *the precept of the Lord*: yet our Saviour thought fit to repeat it even a third time, in these terms: *These things I command you, that ye love one another.* John xv. 17.

Was there ever a precept delivered in so pressing a manner; or in circumstances that could give a greater weight and authority to it? However, lest any thing should be wanting to induce us to a faithful practice of it, our Saviour took care to propose the most endearing motives to oblige us to it; for he had no sooner declared, that *it was his command, that we should love one*
another,

another, as he had loved us, but he forthwith added; by this token all men shall know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another. John xiii.

35. And having again repeated the same command, he again repeats the same engaging motive, in a more tender expression, thus; *ye shall be my friends, if ye do what I command you.* John xv. 14.

Can any one after this have so little regard to the duty he owes his Heavenly Father, as to harbour an ill will to his neighbour? Or can the heart of any Christian be so hardened with malice, as not to be softened into a compliance by such endearing motives, nor prevailed upon to depose all manner of rancour or malice, even to the worst of enemies? For we must not think that *Christ*, in commanding us to love one another, meant only to oblige us to love our friends: the very word of the precept excludes any such interpretation. *I command you (says Christ) that you love one another as I loved you.* Now he loved us when we were his enemies; and loved us so as to shed his blood for us. We cannot therefore love as he did, unless we love all without exception; and the meaning of the precept manifestly imports, that as he loved us in spite of all our sins and imperfections, as he loved us, notwithstanding the ingratitude, with which he knew we should repay his infinite goodness; finally, as he loved us when we were effectually his enemies, so we must love one another, without distinction of friend or foe, benefactor or persecutor. In a word, love is a debt we owe to all mankind, and which no provocation of ingratitude, injuries or affronts can ever cancel. This is manifestly the doctrine of *Christ*, which he took care to establish from the very beginning

ginning of his preaching, and bequeathed to us in his last will and testament.

But though his tongue had been silent, his actions speak loud enough to inform us of our duty: For let us but consider him in every part of his life, and trace his actions and sufferings, from the stable of *Bethlehem* to *Mount Calvary*; and we shall find them all but one continued practice of love and charity to his enemies? Were not all his voluntary sufferings, the poverty, humiliations, and hardships, he endured at *Bethlehem*, in *Egypt*, and at *Nazareth*; were they not, I say, all undertaken for love of his enemies?

But when he now began to manifest himself to the world by his doctrine and miracles, what contradictions, revilings, persecutions, and affronts did he not immediately meet with from his enemies amongst the *Jews*? Being continually traduced by them for being an *impostor*, *magician*, *drunkard*, *sabbath-breaker*, *disturber of the public peace*, and what not? And how did *Christ* behave himself on these occasions? How did he revenge himself of his enemies? *St. Peter* tells us in these few words, *When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.* Oh! no; it was not our Saviour's method to recriminate upon his adversaries, or pay them in their own coin, by returning injuries for injuries, ill language for ill language, reproaches for reproaches: He had no other way of revenge than by doing good for evil, and heaping favours on those that persecuted and reviled him; so that all the ill usage he received from the *Jews*, could not hinder him from spending three whole years amongst them, in continual endeavours to procure them everlasting good: He spent the day in preaching to them
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the word of life, and the night in sending up his prayers to Heaven in their behalf: He wrought all sorts of miracles amongst them, curing their sick, raising their dead, healing their lepers, restoring their deaf, dumb, and blind to their perfect senses; and, in a word, doing good to every one that stood in need of this help; and all this for the sake of people, the most ungrateful that ever lived upon the face of the earth; and who, he knew, would at last repay all his favours with a most ignominious death.

And 'tis particularly in this last scene of his life we ought to behold him with astonishment and admiration: First, then, let us consider him at his last supper; and see him there prostrate at the traitor's feet washing and wiping them, with the same marks of love and tenderness, as if he were one of his truest friends. Oh! what a confounding sight is this, to those who stomach a real or imaginary injury to that degree, as even to refuse to speak a friendly word, or pay the ordinary duties of civility to the supposed authors of it! Proud worms of the earth! Can we see, without blushing, the Son of God prostrate before a traitor, endeavouring to gain him by the most astonishing submissions; can we, I say, see this, and at the same time harbour a resentment in our breasts! Or think it beneath us to stoop to any thing to gain our brother! How will this action of *Christ* confound us at the day of judgment, if we make it not now our pattern! This certainly was such an astonishing act of submission, goodness, and charity that nothing can surpass it.

However, let us still go farther with him, and follow him to the garden of *Gethsemani*: There we shall see him kissing and saluting *Judas* with

the name of friend; and immediately after restoring the ear of *Malchus*, one of those that came to seize him: Next, let us accompany him to the palaces of *Annas* and *Caiphas*: In the one he received a blow on the cheek; in the other his enemies both buffeted him, and spit him in the face: But did he return blow for blow, or affront for affront? Nothing less: *As a lamb* (says *Isaiah*) *brought to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers, he was dumb, and opened not his mouth.* Lastly, let us accompany him to *Mount Calvary*, where we shall neither find him heaping curses on his enemies, nor calling down vengeance upon them; but, on the contrary, sending up to Heaven his prayers for them; earnestly supplicating his Father to forgive them; nay, even apologizing for them, as far as truth would permit; and, lastly, dying for them.

Thus we see in how eminent a manner *Christ* practised what he taught: We see his doctrine and example are exactly uniform, and conspire with a wonderful harmony to instruct us in our duty, and oblige us in the performance of it: But if no sense of duty, though pressed upon us with united force of the plainest precepts, and most illustrious examples, be powerful enough to work upon our stubborn and rebellious hearts, the consideration of self-interest ought at least to prevail upon us: We must therefore consider, that *according to the measure with which we shall measure to others, it will also be measured to us*: If, for some injury received, we harbour malice in our hearts against the author of it, we shut up the bowels of divine mercy against us: But if we be easy in forgiving one another, the mercy we shew him will draw down mercy from Heaven upon us.

THE

THE FIFTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

IT IS OUR INTEREST TO FORGIVE AND LOVE
OUR ENEMIES.

O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all thy debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant. Matt. xviii. 32.

THE main drift of the parable, whence I have taken my text, is to convince us, that it is our interest, as well as duty, to pardon injuries: For the servant mentioned in it, being summoned to make his accounts, was found to be indebted *ten thousand talents* to his lord; who, upon his humble request that he would have patience with him, forgave him the whole debt: But because he refused, soon after, to forgive his fellow-servant the trifling debt of a *hundred pence*, his lord, justly moved to indignation with his unworthy behaviour, condemned him to be delivered to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due to him.

This is the substance of the parable, in the moral whereof we may read the just punishment of those who die without charity; for there is no mercy after death for them that shew no mercy in this life: So that whilst they refuse to forgive and love their enemies, they become the worst of enemies to themselves. Having therefore proved, in the foregoing discourse, that it is the indispensable duty of every Christian to forgive and love his enemies, the subject of this shall be to shew, that it is likewise his true interest to do it.

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It is certainly every man's interest to obtain the discharge of an immense debt, by forgiving a trifle : Now this is our very case, in reference to Almighty God on the one hand, and our neighbour on the other : For if we consider the multitude and grievousness of our sins, and the punishment due to them, we shall find ourselves in the unhappy condition of the servant, who owed *ten thousand talents* to his lord : But as he readily forgave him the whole debt upon his earnest supplication : so Almighty God is ready to shew us the same mercy, provided we imitate in some measure his goodness, in compassionating such of our fellow servants as are indebted to us for some offence committed against us ; which if compared to our grievous offences against Almighty God, will not even hold the proportion of an *hundred pence* to the vast debt of *ten thousand talents* : Yet, upon these easy terms, God's infinite goodness offers us the pardon of our sins : But the condition is indispensable, and if it be not heartily and sincerely complied with, we become accountable to God for the whole debt we owe him, and may read our own fate in the sentence pronounced against the hard-hearted servant in the parable ; which our Saviour concludes with these remarkable words : *So likewise shall my father do unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* Mat. xviii. 35.

Whoever therefore has recourse to the sacred tribunal of penance, in order to obtain the pardon of sins, though he seemingly brings all the dispositions requisite to qualify him for that blessing ; if he comes with a hatred in his heart to any person in the world, he is utterly unworthy and incapable of the mercy he pretends to ; his repentance is a mockery ; his confession
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is void; his absolution null; and instead of discharging his debt, he only inflames the reckoning, and returns back with the additional guilt of sacrilege, over and above his other sins: So that whoever bears a hatred to his neighbour is in a damnable state; and if he continues and dies in it, there is no room for mercy for him; God will, in this respect, deal with him as just as we deal with our neighbour; if we forgive we shall be forgiven: but if we entertain deep and lasting resentments of injuries received, God will also remember the injustices we have committed against him.

This is clearly insinuated in the very prayer composed by *Christ* himself, and which we daily offer up to God for the pardon of our sins: For in this prayer we beg of God *to forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*. Which in reference to one that bears hatred in his heart, is either mocking God, or cursing himself. For 'tis begging God's hatred instead of reconciliation, and bespeaking a denial of the pardon he seemingly sues for. This, I say, is the true meaning of this prayer, when it is pronounced by a tongue that holds a correspondence with a heart envenomed with hatred to any one: A person under these unhappy circumstances cries out for justice instead of mercy, for vengeance instead of compassion: And he needs not doubt, but if he persists in that unchristian disposition, his prayer will be heard according to its true meaning; and God will forgive him his trespasses, just as he forgives them that trespass against him.

The second reason, to shew how much it is our interest to forgive and love our enemies, is, because whoever has not charity in his heart, loses the fruit of all his other virtues. For charity

rity is not only the queen and mother, but the very life and soul of all Christian virtues ; so that without it they are dead, and can bring forth no fruit conducing to life everlasting. This is the doctrine of St. Paul, 1 Cor. xiii. *Though I speak* (says he) *with tongues of men and angels, and have not charity ; I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal : And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understanding all mysteries : And though I have faith so as to remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing ; and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profits me nothing.* Thus St. Paul ; who leaves no room to doubt of what I have said, viz. that without charity, and by consequence without the love of our enemies, which is a breach of it, all other virtues profit nothing to salvation. Devotion without charity, leads to hypocrisy and delusion : Sacrifice and fasting are of no merit without it ; and the very greatest austerities and sufferings will not entitle us to any reward in Heaven, if charity be not in the heart. Nay, though it should effectually happen, what St. Paul supposes, that a person should lay down his life, and be burnt alive upon the account of religion, if he should prove so unhappy, as at the same time to harbour in his breast a secret hatred to his neighbour, the flames that should consume his body, would not rescue his wretched soul from the everlasting flames of Hell.

It is true, it is more probable that Almighty God would, in that case, rather permit him to renounce his faith, and turn barefaced apostate, than to suffer such an hypocrite to appear a champion in his cause ; as *Baronius* relates that it once happened at *Antioch*, to an unfortunate priest

priest called *Sapricius*, who had contracted a great friendship with one *Nicephorus* a layman. But as it often comes to pass, that the greatest friendships turn into the greatest hatreds; these two friends became such mortal enemies, that they could not endure to see or speak to another; and thus continued for a long time, till *Nicephorus*, being disturbed with it in his conscience, both employed the mediation of friends, and went himself to *Sapricius* to make his peace with him: But *Sapricius*, hardened with hatred, rejected all terms of reconciliation.

It happened in the mean time, that the emperor then reigning raised a violent persecution against the Church; and great numbers of Christians being every where taken up and imprisoned, *Sapricius* was taken amongst others at *Antioch*, and accused before the governor of that city, being a Christian and a Priest; both which he boldly confessed, and upon his refusing to offer incense to the idols, was cast into a dungeon, and condemned to the torture, which he suffered with great courage, and was thereupon sentenced to lose his head.

As he was going to the place of execution, *Nicephorus*, who had been informed of what had passed, ran in haste to meet him upon the way; and falling prostrate at his feet, beseeched him with many tears to forgive him, and be reconciled to him: But *Sapricius*, turning away his head, went on, without taking notice of him: *Nicephorus* being extremely troubled at it, and having his heart full of true Christian concern, for the imminent danger *Sapricius* was in of perishing eternally, took a shorter way, and met him again upon his knees, humbly beseeching him for *Jesus Christ* his sake, for whom he was going to shed his blood, to forget past injuries,

injuries, and be reconciled to him. But *Sapricius* went on as before, without giving any mark of his being better affected towards him.

Being come to the place of execution, here it was that Almighty God, who had hitherto followed him with his holy inspirations, withdrew his grace from him, and abandoned him to his own weakness; for when the executioner was just going to cut off his head, his heart on a sudden failed him; and he who had before endured the greatest torments, was now overcome with the fear of an easy death; and applying himself to the officer that was present to oversee the execution, told him he was ready to obey the emperor's command, if he would give him his life, which was immediately granted. Whereupon *Nicephorus*, who beheld with a mixture of grief and astonishment the visible justice of God, in the sudden fall of *Sapricius*, being at that instant moved with a secret impulse from Heaven, stepped forward of his own accord into the list, declared himself a Christian, was thereupon immediately sentenced to have his head cut off, and in reward of his charity carried away the glorious crown of martyrdom, which the other had justly forfeited for his want of charity, and hardness of heart.

This is a terrible example. A priest, a confessor, a martyr, as we may call him, if we consider the torments he had suffered; utterly abandoned by God, for no other apparent sin, than that of refusing to be reconciled to his enemy. An example, which ought to terrify those, who entertain lasting resentments in their hearts: For certainly never any man stood fairer for a crown of martyrdom, nor came nearer to the brink of eternal bliss, and lost both the one and the other, than the unfortunate *Sapricius*: We may

may justly consider him as a ship that returns richly laden from a long and dangerous voyage, and sunk in the very harbour: Tho' we may say more properly, that his hatred to *Nicephorus* turned all his gold and silver (as *Isaiah* expresses it) into dross. This was the *rust*, that tarnished all the lustre and beauty of the most glorious sufferings he had undergone; it was the *moth*, that consumed and destroyed all the precious ornaments of his soul, and made them of no value in the sight of God: So that although he had effectually received the stroke of death, unless Almighty God had first changed the disposition of his heart, his soul had nevertheless been lost for all eternity. But it pleased God to prevent it by permitting him to fall visibly: both for his Church's sake, and to instruct every Christian, that even the most heroic virtues in appearance, will hold no weight in the balance of the sanctuary, unless they be perfected by charity, which is the accomplishment of the law, and gives every virtue its full value.

Let us not then delude ourselves, with flattering appearances of a firm faith or zeal for religion, of strong fancied fervours, or of our being perhaps exempt from what is openly scandalous and criminal: For if we harbour in our hearts a hatred to any person whatsoever, we are in the state of mortal sin; and all our pretended innocence and faith will not save us. And truly, when the resentment of an injury, whether real or supposed, comes to such a height as to cause a rancour in the mind, and a sensible alteration in our behaviour towards the party concerned, so that we can neither converse with him, nor speak friendly to him, nor pay him the ordinary duties of civility, we have reason to suspect our souls are venom'd with
it;

it; especially, if it becomes a lasting disposition.

If you say, it is not always in our power to overcome resentments; and injuries will sometimes affect us very sensibly, whether we will or no; nay there are even certain natural antipathies, which we have not in our power to correct: I answer, that a resentment or antipathy is only sinful as far as it is voluntary. Nay, both the one and the other are consistent with charity in the heart, and we may always make this favourable judgment of them, when they have no influence upon our words or actions, to the prejudice of the party whom they regard: For if, in spite of such resentments or antipathies, we not only keep a bridle upon our tongues when we have an itching to say some spiteful thing of the party concerned; but are ever ready to speak well of him, and do him such good offices as occasion shall present, we may then safely judge, that, being thus overruled by charity, they are purely the effect of nature, and the will has no share in them.

Whence it follows, *first*, that there is a large difference between the *love of charity*, and a *natural affection*. The first regards our neighbour, precisely as he bears the image of God in his soul; and this love we owe to all mankind: The second regards him only as he has some qualities agreeable to us; which therefore is usually confined to a very narrow compass.

Hence it follows, *2dly*, that the love we owe our neighbour, whether friend or foe, consists precisely in a sincere desire and inclination of the heart to do him good for God's sake. And since this inclination is consistent, as I have said, with an involuntary resentment of injuries received, 'tis evident that the law of charity is not violated

violated by it, as long as we act in contradiction to it.

However, we ought to be always very jealous of any such resentment; we ought to regard it as a dangerous temptation, and be upon our guard against it: Because the heart may be envenomed by it; as we must judge it is, when instead of using the obvious means to overcome it, we rather cherish and indulge it, by frequently musing upon, and discoursing with a certain bitterness, of the injury that has been done us; when we take a pleasure to feel the offender traduced, or feel a certain secret joy at any cross that happens to him; but especially when we refuse to make some reasonable advances towards a hearty reconciliation with him: For these are all strong symptoms of a settled hatred; and our saying in this case, *I forgive him, I wish him no harm, I am in charity with him*, is no more than a mere form of speech, which signifies nothing; and serves only to encrease the difficulty of our cure, by silencing, in some measure, the murmurs of an uneasy conscience, and flattering ourselves into a false security: For, till our actions and behaviour give testimony, that we are truly in charity, there lies a snake in the grass, and we carry a viper in our breasts, that will sting us to death: *For, whoever loves not (says St. John) remains in death.*

I own, to love an enemy, and do good to those that hate and persecute us, is a hard lesson to practise. But since it is a lesson taught by *Christ* himself; since without it no pardon of sins can be obtained, and all other virtues are but so many useless ornaments, it is as indispensable as it is hard: And therefore whatever the difficulties are, they must be overcome; for, to die without charity, is to die in a damnable state;

state; and since it is so difficult a lesson to learn, we have but little encouragement to hope to practise it at the hour of death, if we neglect it now: For passions once deeply sunk into the soul are not to be thrown off on a sudden: so that the same hatred which accompanies us to our death-beds, will, in all probability follow us a step farther, and bear us company to the grave; there being scarce any passion, that, when it is indulged, takes a deeper root than that of hatred and aversion. It is easily remedied, if due care be taken in the beginning; but a long continuance renders it very hard to be cured.

Let us beseech Almighty God to preserve us from so dangerous an evil; and fill our hearts with such an abundant charity, as may at the last hour entitle our souls to the blessed joys above; where charity reigns in her full lustre, uniting all the blessed souls to *Jesus Christ*, and in him to one another, with a pure, disinterested, and unchangeable love.

THE FIFTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE MEANS TO PRESERVE PEACE WITH MEN, BY
AVOIDING CONTENTIOUSNESS.

If any man be contentious, we have no such custom.
1 Cor. xi. 16.

IT appears plainly from these words of St. Paul, that the spirit of contention is not a Christian spirit: And the reason is clear; because charity, which is a virtue peculiarly recommended by Christ, cannot possibly be long maintained, either in a state or private family, where the spirit of contention reigns.

Now

Now this unchristian spirit is principally kept up by an indiscreet forwardness, either in thwarting men's humours, or contradicting their opinions; especially when they are espoused with heat. We are often faulty, in not having a due regard to the temper of those we converse with; and being more intent upon gratifying our own humours, than managing, with a charitable tenderness, those of our neighbour: We are forward in contradicting his opinions, because we abound too much in our own sense; and we oppose his passions with heat, because we are not masters of our own: And it is from this indiscretion that numberless disputes, contentions, and animosities arise; which therefore we are bound to avoid as much as it is possible, in order to preserve peace and charity with all men; but especially with such as have some near relation to us, either by proximity of blood, or neighbourhood, or by living under the same roof, where God's providence has allotted us our station.

The subject then of this, and the following discourse, shall be to shew how wary and circumspect we ought to be, not to give offence, by an over-fondness of our own opinions, or an indiscreet forwardness in contradicting those of our neighbour.

It is a common weakness to be fond of our own opinions, and desirous to have them approved by others. We are fond of them, just as parents are of their children, because we consider them as our own product, or a part of ourselves; and we desire to have them approved by others, because this is a kind of conquest which flatters our vanity. Hence it is, that all
contradiction

contradiction is more or less disagreeable ; because whoever contradicts another, does not only rob him of this pleasure, but pretends to a superiority of knowledge or judgment over him, at least as to the point in question ; which, being a sort of humiliation to man's natural pride, cannot but mortify him in some degree ; but it is still more mortifying, according as the temper or circumstances of the person contradicted render him more sensible of it, and, by consequence, less able to bear it : For some are more capricious, or stiffer in their opinions than others ; and therefore less capable of bearing a contradiction.

This is the case, *first*, of those who are naturally of a strong imagination. For any thing strongly fancied fills a man's mind so, as to leave no room for reason to disabuse him ; tho' he be ever so much in the wrong. So that such a one is very like a person placed so near to any object, that he can see nothing beyond it.

It is, *2dly*, the case of persons possessed with any opinion, wherein the interest or reputation of a party is concerned : For opinions of this nature are generally espoused with heat ; and to contradict them is the same as declaring war.

3dly, It is the case of those, who have been from their infancy brought up in any opinion ; which seldom fails to give so strong a prepossession in favour of it, that to contradict it has generally no other effect than to exasperate the party so prepossessed, and give him a very ill opinion both of the judgment and good-manners of him, who declares himself against it.

Lastly,

Lastly, there are certain worldly advantages; as *quality, riches, power*, and the like, which contribute very much to make men positive and stiff in their opinions; because, these persons being generally flattered by those that are about them, and unaccustomed to contradiction, they contract a certain habit of thinking themselves in the right, because they are seldom or never advertised that they are in the wrong. So that they look upon a man, who takes the liberty to contradict them, as an invader of a right of which they have had a long and undisputed possession.

Now though we ought not to attribute this weakness to any person in particular, unless we cannot possibly avoid making such a judgment of him; yet it is adviseable to behave ourselves so towards the generality of men, as if they were really guilty of it. This precaution can never hurt, and it may do good on many occasions; because, by means of it, we may insinuate ourselves into the affection, and gain the esteem of those, with whom we are united in society; which will naturally dispose them to hearken favourably to such advice, as, upon occasion, will be useful to them; whereas, if we shock them, by an indiscreet forwardness in opposing their sentiments, besides the heats and breach of charity it may occasion, it cannot but lessen our credit with them, which we should always endeavour to keep up, not so much for our own, as for our neighbour's sake; that is, to render ourselves capable of doing him good, which we can never hope to do if we become disagreeable to him, since the very best advice loses its fruit, when it comes from a person whom we neither love nor esteem.

I know

I know the common pretence of those who are of a thwarting temper, is, that it is a charity we owe to our neighbour, to disabuse him, when he is in an error: I grant the maxim is good in general, but the use of it is very nice and difficult in practice; and requires several conditions, to make it a real act of that charity, which they pretend to take for their guide: *1st*, They must be very sure of the main point, *viz.* that the opinion they oppose is an error; *2^d*, that their motive, in opposing it, is no other than the good of their neighbour; which evidently supposes a probability of success; and *3^d*, that it is an error of such dangerous consequence, as ought to be removed. Now, when all these conditions are carefully observed, then we may safely say, it is charity, and not the spirit of contradiction, that moves us. I shall touch briefly upon each particular.

First, then, to make charity a just pretence to contradict any man, especially with the hazard of engaging in a hot dispute, we ought to be very sure of his being in an error. Now to be sure of this, it suffices not to have seemingly reason on our side; but there ought to be, in a manner, full evidence for it: For if this be wanting, 'tis rationally to be supposed that our neighbour has as much appearance of reason for his opinion, as we pretend to have for our own; and where there are reasons on both sides, the matter in question is at most doubtful, and either side may be either in the right or wrong: In which case, 'tis a presumption to give a positive preference to our own opinion; and conclude peremptorily, that a man is in the wrong, because he sees not things in the same light as we do. For a person truly humble is rather diffident of his own judgment, and will sooner chuse

chuse to err by thinking himself in the wrong, when he has the truth of the question on his side, than by not yielding to it when it is against him.

But supposing now there is clear evidence that our neighbour is in error, the next thing to be considered, before we undertake to contradict him, is, whether it be an error of that consequence as ought to be removed: That is, whether there be a danger of some considerable prejudice, either to his spiritual or temporal good, if he should persist in it: For in this case, 'tis certainly a charitable office to endeavour to disabuse him: But if no such danger appears, and neither his reputation, nor interest of soul or body, be concerned, 'tis generally better to leave him in possession of his error, than hazard a dispute about it. The reason hereof is clear; because though truth be always a real good, and error a sort of evil, yet if the remedy be dangerous, or even worse than the evil, we pretend to cure by it, 'tis both charitable and prudent to forbear using it; considering especially, that by this moderation, in over-looking trivial mistakes, we become more capable of serving our neighbour in occasions of greater importance.

Our Saviour himself has sufficiently recommended this rule by his own practice: For tho' he was full of all truth, and had a perfect knowledge of every thing, he only delivered these sacred truths, in which God's honour and the good of souls were concerned: It is true, he discovered the falsehood of some apochryphal traditions of the *Pharisees*; because the more ignorant sort were misled by them, to the prejudice of their salvation: But, as to errors in *philosophy, history, physick, eloquence*, or other human sciences,

sciences, though they were numberless, and perfectly known by him, he neither undertook to confute any of them himself, nor ever charged his apostles to do it; but left every man the freedom of his own way of thinking, though ever so much subject to errors and mistakes.

Now, since we are bound to follow the example of *Christ* and his apostles, it is evident, that in matters of no consequence, 'tis better to let an opinion prevail, though ever so erroneous, than to hazard the ordinary heats and contentions of a dispute, to confute it; because the good we aim at, in endeavouring to rectify a man's intellect, bears no proportion to the evil we hazard in exasperating his mind; and peace is always preferable to a trivial truth: Is there not many times, as much noise and contest about meer trifles, as if the fundamentals of religion were at stake? And what is the source of all this heat and strife, in which charity is so often most grievously wounded? Zeal for truth is the usual pretence, but pride is but too often the real cause. We cannot bear, without some resentment, to see men differ from us in their opinions; and the ground of this resentment is not so much, because their opinions are contrary to the truth, as because they are contrary to our judgment; which we look upon as undervalued by not being submitted to.

There is, I know not how, a secret ambition in our nature to over-top others, even in the most trivial things; which St. *Austin* calls *superbæ victoriæ*, proud victories, and of which he accuses himself in his *confessions*: But no conquest flatters our vanity with a more sensible pleasure, than that of knowledge or understanding; and I doubt not but it happens many times, that a person dictating in a private assembly,

and

and fancying himself to be the oracle of the company, is guilty of a deeper pride, than a general at the head of a victorious army: This desire of surpassing in knowledge, is amongst your scholars called *emulation*; and encouraged by their masters as a spur to learning; but I fear, it proves but too often the nourishment of a pride, which sticks by them as long as they live; and renders them, by reason of their positiveness and arrogance, both insupportable to men, and hateful to God.

But how far soever this reflection may be true, 'tis certain, that the desire of domineering over other men's judgments, is a prevailing passion in our nature; and therefore when we find ourselves disappointed, in not meeting with all the deference and submission we expect, we take it as an affront done to our judgment; we grow waspish and impatient, and seek immediately to revenge ourselves, by mustering up all our reasons to convince him, that we understand things better than he: Not that we are concerned for his being in an error; but our whole concern is to do justice to ourselves, by forcing him, by the dint of argument, to see and own it: And whereas we ought to rest satisfied, with the consciousness of having truth on our side, we seek, moreover, the malignant pleasure of mortifying our neighbour, by extorting from him an acknowledgment that we are in the right, and he is in the wrong.

This is the usual source of contradiction, and the root of that heat and contention about things of no moment, which seldom fails to wound charity, and often utterly destroys it: But put the case now, that there is not only clear evidence of our neighbour's being in an error, but that it is an error of such consequence, as will

be prejudicial to him, if he persists in it: The question then is, how far the duty of charity obliges us to use endeavours to undeceive him? Now, 'tis certain, before we make any attempts towards it, we ought to consider, whether there is a prospect of success; and the principal points to be examined are, *first*, whether we have credit enough with the party concerned, to presume that he will hearken favourably to us: *2dly*, whether we have a sufficient talent of persuading; or whether we shall not rather prejudice the cause of truth, than promote it: And, *3dly*, whether the party concerned be of a temper to bear contradiction: For, if we have sufficient grounds to judge, that either we ourselves are unqualified to gain our point, or he to yield to truth; the discreetest part we can take is that of silence: Because, since the principal end of charity is the good of our neighbour, the obligation of it ceases of course, when there is no prospect to bring about that end, from whatever cause the obstacle to it may proceed.

This rule alone almost cuts off all personal disputes about religion. For experience shews but too plainly, how unsuccessful such disputes usually are.

This is many times occasioned by the incapacity of those, who will needs set up for champions of the faith, when they neither have knowledge nor temper enough to manage a dispute, to the advantage of their cause, and so truth is rather prejudiced than promoted by their zeal: And therefore, the best thing they can do is to wave all such disputes, and make converts by the fervour of their prayers, and example of holy life: For when persons are unqualified for combats of this nature, their case is much the same with that of *Josephus*, and *Azurias*

mentioned



mentioned in the book of *Maccabees*, who being ambitious to get a name by fighting, would needs hazard a battle with their enemies, contrary to the orders they had received from *Judas Maccabeus*; and the success proved answerable to the rashness of their undertaking: For their whole army was defeated; and the scripture gives this reason for it, *because they were not of the race of those men, by whom Israel was to be saved*. Now every man is not made to be a defender of the faith; and they who have no talent for it, may be sure it is no part of their calling; and that God requires no more of them than the edification of a Christian life; which is the best proof they can give of the truth of the religion they profess.

But let a person be ever so capable of maintaining the truth, yet if the adverse party be hardened against it, either by natural obstinacy, interest, or prejudice of education, 'tis all labour lost to attempt to undeceive him: Such a one is blind, because he will be so; and if you will needs force him to open his eyes by the dint of argument and reason, 'twill have no other effect, than to make him shut them the closer, that he may not see the light, which would convince him of his error. A person under these circumstances, *hates the light as Christ expresses it*; and the clearer it is, the more it offends him: And therefore, since doing an ungrateful thing can never be a proper means to make converts, it follows, that disputes in this case can be in no manner of use, but will rather serve to make the adverse party more obstinate in his error: Opposition and contradiction will put him upon his guard, and excite him to a more industrious application, to elude or baffle the reasons you bring to convince him.

So

So that it is plain, that charity cannot be the motive of entering into disputes with persons thus disposed; since there can be no charity in applying remedies, which will only inflame the distemper: And therefore, in cases like this, a modest silence is ever preferable to a noisy dispute: And if our charity be disappointed by it, in its desire of propagating the truth, it finds at least its account in preserving peace, which is always a desirable good, and expressly recommended by *St. Paul*, who exhorts us to *have peace with all men as far as it is possible*: nay, and by *Christ* himself, who styles all lovers of peace *blessed*; and assures them, that they shall be in a special manner called *the children of God*.

THE FIFTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, have peace with all men, Rom. xii. 18.

I HAVE shewed in my last discourse, how wary we ought to be not to give offence, by an indiscreet forwardness in contradicting our neighbour: However, since an unreasonable constraint would utterly destroy the principal fruit of society; because the chief end of conversation is to communicate our thoughts to one another, which cannot be done unless men have a decent freedom allowed them to speak their mind; and since it may also be reasonably supposed, that all men are not of that obstinate temper, as to be fond of their errors, especially in matters of importance; it follows, that a modest contradiction may be both useful and acceptable

acceptable on certain occasions, and absolutely necessary in others; namely, when there is a probability that our speaking will be profitable, and our silence prejudicial to the spiritual or temporal good of our neighbour: The only point that then remains to be examined is, what precautions are necessary in order to prevent our giving offence in the manner of contradicting; which shall be the subject of this discourse.

Opposing men's opinions or inclinations, even in matters wherein their interest or honour is concerned, is one of those ungrateful charitable offices, which must be managed with the utmost tenderness: For, though necessity cannot justify the doing a harsh thing, nothing can justify the doing it in a harsh way; and, in reality, 'tis not so much the harshness of the thing itself, as the manner of doing it, that often gives offence; because it makes men judge, that our principal aim is not to do them good, but to take a pleasure in giving them pain; and whenever any one has that opinion of us, all we can say to him is received with prejudice, and lost upon him.

Hence it is, that fraternal correction, admonishing a person of his faults, or advising him contrary to his inclinations, though they be all charitable offices, and many times absolutely necessary, yet become very often fruitless; because we are not careful enough to correct the bitterness, which is inseparable from those duties, but rather increase it, by mixing some of our own gall with it: And so 'tis in the case of contradicting mens' opinions; the doing it, in many cases, carries bitterness with it; but the way of doing it may be so tempered with sweetness,

ness, that no reasonable person can take offence at it.

I will not, however, pretend to give rules so universal, as shall suit all persons and conditions; they will arise naturally from the occasions we fall into, and the difference of circumstances must in a great measure lead us to them: For the way of treating with those that are above us, either in quality or authority, is certainly very different from that of conversing with equals or inferiors: Superiors are not to be spoken to but with deference and respect: A smart or snappish way of contradicting them is both unmannerly and undutiful; and a person surprized into this fault, ought to make some atonement for it upon the spot: All manner of civility is likewise due to equals when we deliver our sentiments in opposition to theirs; and even inferiors have a title to a certain affability, which may make them, in some measure, forget the lowness of their state: So that a regard is certainly to be had to the difference of persons and conditions; and the only general rule I know of, is to study the humour and temper of those, with whom we are most conversant; and accommodate ourselves to it, as the *apostle* did, by *becoming all to all, in order to gain all to Christ*. This, indeed, requires a great stock of virtue, without which no man can be equal and uniform in the practice of this rule, which made a modern author observe, very judiciously, *nothing is so well bred as a Christian*; because, a good Christian is charitable, meek, and humble; and almost all trespasses against good manners, which offend our neighbour, are the fruit of *pride, selfishness, and a rough, unmortified temper*; So that wherever charity abounds, and is joined with a meek and humble heart, there will

will be but little need of rules or precepts. An obliging air, and the art of pleasing in all incident occasions, will result naturally from it.

They who have their dependance at court, and seek to make their fortune that way, are perfectly versed in this art: Because, a discreet and well-managed self-love, which is the perfectest mimic of charity, governs them in all they do. Hence it is, that nothing appears so meek, so humble, so obliging, as the behaviour of these men: They make it their business to study the humour of the prince or favourite minister, to whom they make their court; they approach him with the greatest respect; watch the most favourable moments for it; and weigh every word they have to say, for fear of giving the least offence. Now, when *charity* abounds in Christians, as much as *self-love* does in the children of this world, it produces the very same effects in their outward behaviour: I mean, the same attention to please, and the same precautions to avoid every thing, which, by displeasing, may frustrate the end they aim at, of doing good to their neighbour.

Charity therefore is the best rule, and the surest guide in all the different occurrences of human life, when any ungrateful duty is to be performed; as is that, when the good of our neighbour obliges us to oppose his inclinations, or contradict his sentiments; and maintain some truth which is disagreeable to him. For whoever consults the rule of charity, will be sure, at least, to avoid in the case mentioned, such faults as are directly opposite to its principal end.

The first of these, is a certain *decisive air*, in delivering our opinions. This is very ungrate-

ful in any person whatever, let his capacity or character be what it will. The reason is, *first*, because this way of deciding dogmatically, carries with it an air of presumption and self-conceit; which all men hate, and no superiority of wit or condition can justify: And, *secondly*, because it betrays a secret ambition of domineering over, and captivating all men's judgments to their own; which is nothing less than invading a liberty to which all men have a natural right, of using their own reason, and may be called a kind of tyranny in conversation.

They who are guilty of this fault, whenever their reasons will not convince, are apt to proceed to open or at least tacit reproaches; as by saying, *that what they advance is inconceivable: that they are surprised how any man of sense can doubt of it*, and the like: Which, in effect, is nothing less than accusing a man, either of stupidity in not seeing, or wilful obstinacy in not yielding to clear reason. Now this is certainly a very improper way to bring men over to the truth: Because, we may be sure, that they who are not or will not be convinced by our reasons, will never be converted by our reproaches: For reproaches add no weight to reasons, nor serve any way to set them in a clearer light; but only betray a want of temper, and an excessive stiffness in our own opinion.

Another fault to be avoided in the manner of contradicting, is the doing it with an air of contempt: As by telling a person, *that we pity his ignorance, or think it not worth our pains to undeceive him*; or expressing our disdain of him by a scornful look or gesture. This relishes of arrogance, and is highly provoking; because as the love of esteem is one of the most predominant passions of human nature, and ought
therefore

therefore to be managed with the greatest tenderness; so nothing wounds it more sensibly, than any mark of contempt; which made St. Paul exhort all Christians to prevent one another with demonstrations of esteem and respect; *honore invicem praevenientes*; and we ought always to look upon it as a trespass against the charity we owe our neighbour, to give him to understand, either by words or actions, that we have no esteem for him; because, by so doing, we shut up the most natural way by which we have access to his heart, and by rendering ourselves odious, become wholly unuseful to him.

Finally, a third fault to be avoided in the manner of contradicting, is the doing it with too much heat; because all heat and passion is not only contrary to Christian modesty, but likewise apt to provoke those of the contrary opinion to retaliate upon us with the same heat, and so turn conversation into mere noise and clamour, the usual consequence whereof is scurrilous or reflecting language; and one word drawing on another, a breach of peace and charity must follow of course.

But besides this inconvenience, which is considerable, any degree of heat in disputes is prejudicial to the cause of truth. *1st*, because it looks like offering violence to a man's reason, and coming upon him with an armed force; which, instead of convincing, serves rather to provoke him to a more obstinate resistance: and *2^{dly}*, because whoever maintains an opinion with heat, is justly suspected to adhere to it rather out of passion, than conviction of reason; which naturally gives a prepossession against it, and takes off from the weight of the reasons for it.

Besides,

Besides, passion always obscures reason more or less, and disables it from exerting itself; whereas he who possesses himself, is both master of his reason in its full extent, and has words much better at command, to set forth his thoughts in the most advantageous light. Truth, in the mouth of such a person, appears in its full strength and beauty; and whether the adverse party yields to it or not, he has at least the comfort of being conscious to himself, that he has acted both like a good Christian, and a man of good sense.

These therefore are the principal faults to be avoided in the manner of contradicting, and in all other cases, when charity obliges us to speak any ungrateful truth: Care must be taken in all such occurrences to season our discourse so, with obliging expressions, and an air of modesty, that the party to whom we speak may be convinced, that nothing but our concern for his good, could have induced us to undertake so disagreeable a task, that we even offer violence to our nature, and suffer much more pain, than we can possibly give him in the doing of it.

Some perhaps will be apt to think, that civility and good manners, in this as well as other cases, are but the ornamental part of human life, but no part of Christian duty. But this is a great mistake; for civility is not only of itself a moral virtue, but every branch of it has its root in some principle of the gospel. Is not all morality, as it regards our neighbour, epitomized in the short precept of *bearing and forbearing*? And how would Christians abound in good manners, if they but made this precept the rule and standard of their behaviour? How happy would all societies be, in which each member

member performed this part towards the maintaining the common peace? For, by virtue of this rule alone, we should neither wilfully give offence, nor easily take offence, at least at the ordinary slips of inadvertency or surprize. All arrogance, contentiousness, ill humour or caprice, would be utterly banished out of Christian assemblies, and we may confidently say, that whoever has that constant guard upon himself, as to be careful neither to *give nor take offence*, has a just title to the character of what we call a well-bred man. But since it is morally impossible a person should be always equal and uniform in this practice, without the help of the Christian virtue of *humility, meekness*, and particularly the virtue of *charity*; it follows, that civility is grounded upon the very maxims of the gospel, and that christianity is the only solid and lasting foundation of it.

But to shew, that even the most ordinary duties of civility, I mean such as are established by mere custom, have also their foundation in the law of God; I shall conclude, with translating the excellent thoughts of a *French* author upon this subject. “ God, says he, has been pleased to order the world so, that men should be united together in society by a mutual dependance upon one another: So that the one being not able to live in any comfortable manner without the other’s help; this bond of mutual society should not only be useful, but absolutely necessary. Whence it follows, that whatever conduces to keep up this society, comes within the order of this providential disposition; and is in some measure commanded by God, in virtue of the law of nature, which obliges each part to contribute to the good of the whole.

“ Now

“ Now this society cannot possibly subsist but by a reciprocal love and esteem of the members whereof it is composed: For hatred or contempt break the ties that hold it together, and are infallible causes of division; because mankind being a body composed of persons who naturally love and esteem themselves, and by consequence, covet to be loved and esteemed by others; if they should mutually neglect this way of rendering themselves agreeable and useful, the whole world would be no better than a jarring multitude of malcontents dissatisfied with one another, and weary of their own condition: Besides, there being innumerable little things, which cannot be stipulated for by way of bargain, and are only to be purchased for love, and yet contribute very much towards the convenience and comfort of life; it follows, that there can be no other lasting bond of society, than that of natural love and esteem.

“ But since these qualities are lodged in the heart, and are therefore imperceptible to sense, unless they manifest themselves by some outward effects; hence it is that men, by a kind of universal tacit agreement, have introduced certain outward forms of civility, as visits, mutual salutations, compliments of congratulation or condolence, and the like, which should serve as visible tokens of their inward respect and love for each other; the consequence whereof is, that to be wanting to those duties is looked upon as a mark of indifference or disesteem: So that all those who have a claim to our esteem or love, have the same title to the outward civilities, which custom has established as tokens of them; and the omission of them renders us guilty of injustice, by shewing a disposition contrary to what we really owe them: We are therefore

therefore bound to be punctual in all such duties; and the motive of this exactness, is not only conformable to reason, but commanded by God."

These are the sentiments of this author; and they are truly christian and noble. For they teach us the art of pleasing men, and gaining their esteem and love; not upon mean principles of interest or vanity, but upon a higher consideration of pleasing and obeying God: They instruct us in the method of a sort of Christian thrift and management; by making the best of such occurrences, as we almost daily meet with: They shew us how to give a value to the most indifferent actions, which we usually throw away: Finally, we learn from them the true secret of living peaceably with all men, and in all places and families, where God's providence has appointed us our station; which it is impossible to do, if we frequently shock men by our words or actions, or neglect to pay them the civilities they justly expect from us: For this gives occasion to discontents, murmurs, and reproaches; causes at first indifference and coldness, and soon after hatred and aversion.

But, if this care of cultivating and preserving peace, with all Christians in general, be necessary; 'tis of much greater consequence in reference to persons united together by some particular tie; and of the greatest imaginable to married persons. These ought to be as much afraid to give offence, as to give poison to one another: Their study ought to be to please mutually, by all the endearments and reciprocal compliances, that are within the law of God: For if either of the parties makes a slight matter of shocking the other by any ill-humour, capriciousness,

capriciousness, or thwarting temper, it will unavoidably create an uneasiness: This uneasiness will soon change the most tender affection into coldness and indifference, and 'tis particularly in the conjugal state that coldness and indifference are but one remove from hatred and aversion; and no hatred is more irreconcilable than that of married persons. *First*, because the hated object is daily present: And, *secondly*, because it is always grounded upon a resentment of a real or supposed ingratitude, which is the hardest to be forgiven.

These therefore are principally concerned in all that has been said of *disputes*, speaking *ungrateful truths*, *contradiction*, and the usual faults committed in the manner of it. Their obligation of avoiding all such faults, is considerably enforced by the circumstances of their state, which cannot but be unhappy without mutual love and esteem; and it is morally impossible this love and esteem should be preserved amidst frequent jars, disputes, and contradictions; though they be but trifling things. Nay, the smaller the thing is, about which the dispute arises, the greater is the indiscretion, because the mischief it occasions is easier to be avoided: The cause may be a trifle, when the effects and consequences of it are far from being so; since nothing happens more frequently, than that amidst warm disputes about things of no moment, the parties insensibly conceive an aversion towards each other, and part with the highest dissatisfaction on both sides: And when this happens to be the case of married persons, there's an end of peace and happiness in that family.

I shall end with St. Paul's exhortation; *have peace with all men, if it be possible.* Be not lovers
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of contention and strife, but be lovers of peace; and the blessings promised to the peaceful will attend you, both in this life, and in the life to come.

THE FIFTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

OF DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Luke
i. 28.

THESE sacred words, wherewith the *Blessed Virgin* was saluted by the angel *Gabriel*, contain the principal grounds of that devotion, which the Church has always paid her: For though we pay a proportionable degree of honour to all God's saints, and implore the assistance of their prayers, yet the Mother of God is justly honoured with peculiar marks of distinction; and the great number of solemn days, set apart to perpetuate the memory of favours bestowed upon her by Almighty God, are a convincing proof, that the Church is under more than an ordinary solicitude to encourage and promote the devotion of the faithful to her: Nor can it be doubted, but that they who perform this devotion, according to the true spirit and intention of the Church, will reap the fruit of it in a continual improvement in solid virtue. The subject then of this discourse shall be to set forth the principal grounds of this devotion; that is, the proper motives to encourage us to it.

To prevent all mistakes relating to this matter, we must lay it down as an undoubted maxim of Faith, that whatever excellencies we attribute to the *Blessed Virgin*, or whatever terms
we

we make use of to express the esteem and respect we have for her, we must regard her no otherwise than as a *pure creature*; and by consequence, infinitely below God, depending on him, and indebted to him for all the gifts of nature and grace she possessed in this life, and the eminent degree of glory to which she is exalted in Heaven. So that our devotion to the *Blessed Virgin*, like that to other saints, is a *relative honour*, redounding effectually upon, and terminating wholly in God. In honouring her, we honour God much more; and praising and admiring her eminent virtues, we only proclaim the infinite power and bounties of her divine maker, who could enrich a pure creature with such excellent gifts.

And in this we conform ourselves exactly to the humble sentiments she had of herself, and verify literally her prophecy, delivered in these words: *For behold all generations shall call me blessed; because he who is powerful has done great things to me*: By which words the honour and devotion which the Catholic Church has paid her throughout all ages, down to this time, and will continue to pay her to the end of the world, is precisely marked out to us. But she says not, that this honour shall be paid her for any thing she has of herself, but *because he who is powerful has done great things to her*: That is, has bestowed upon her gifts and blessings surpassing all human power. Which part of the prophecy would not be fulfilled, if the Church in honouring the *Blessed Virgin*, meant any thing else, but to honour God's blessing in her. Whoever goes beyond this, or pretends to raise her above the rank of a *pure creature*, and set her upon the level with her Son, is guilty of impiety and blasphemy; and falls into the heresy of the *Collyridians*,

Collyridians, a mad set of bigotted women of *Thrace*; who are reckoned amongst the number of ancient hereticks, by St. *Epiphanius*, for worshipping the *Blessed Virgin*, as a kind of goddess, and assuming to themselves the priestly character, in offering sacrifice to her: For this, I say, they are condemned by St. *Epiphanius*, as guilty of an impious, extravagant, and sacrilegious devotion, and not barely for invoking the *Blessed Virgin*, as will appear manifest to any man, that will but give himself the trouble to read St. *Epiphanius* upon this subject. L. 3. Tom. 3, *Hæresi*, 78. 79.

This therefore is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, viz that the *Blessed Virgin* is a pure creature; that she is to be honoured no otherwise than as such; or, as St. *Epiphanius* expresses it, *non ultra modum & decorum*, not beyond the bounds of moderation and decency. Finally, that it is a sacrilege and idolatry to offer sacrifice to her, or pay her that worship which is due to God alone. But though she be a pure creature we may safely say, she is the most excellent that ever was created: And this suffices abundantly to justify the titles and honours decreed her by the Church, and all those pompous eulogiums of her, transmitted to us in the writings of the holy fathers. I should run out into an excessive length, if I should transcribe any considerable part of them: I will therefore content myself with one out of St. *John Chrysostom*, delivered in these words.

“ The Ever-*Blessed Virgin Mary*, says he,
 “ is surely a great miracle: For, what has ever
 “ been or ever will be greater or more excellent
 “ than she? She alone surpasses in greatness
 “ both Heaven and earth. What was ever more
 “ pure and holy? Neither prophets, nor mar-
 tyrs,

“*tyrs, nor patriarchs, nor angels, nor thrones,*
 “*nor powers, nor seraphim, nor any thing*
 “*amongst creatures, whether visible or invisi-*
 “*ble, can be found greater or more excellent*
 “*than she is: she is both hand-maid and mo-*
 “*ther of God; both mother and virgin. She*
 “*is mother of him who was begotten of the*
 “*Father before all beginning; whom angels*
 “*and men own to be the Lord of all things.*
 “*Do you desire to know how far the *Virgin**
 “**Mary* surpasses the heavenly powers? They*
 “*stand before the throne with fear and trem-*
 “*bling, covering their faces; but she presents*
 “*mankind to him whom she begot; and 'tis*
 “*through her we obtain the pardon of our*
 “*sins.”*

This is *St. Chrysostom's* eulogium of the *Blessed Virgin*; which he concludes with this prayer to her.

“*Wherefore, hail, *virgin* and *mother*; the*
 “*honour, glory, and pillar of the Church; pray*
 “*continually for us to *Jesus Christ*, your Son*
 “*and our Lord; that through thee we may find*
 “*mercy in the day of judgment, and obtain*
 “*those blessings which are laid up for those who*
 “*love God, by the grace and bounty of *Jesus**
 “**Christ* our Lord.”*

Here we see this great saint and champion of the Catholic faith, *first*, makes the panegyric of the *Blessed Virgin*, in such lofty terms, that if any one should do the same now, he would perhaps have been accused of having overstrained his matter; and, *secondly*, moved with the consideration of her superior excellencies above all other creatures, and excited thereby to a confidence in her holy intercession, he humbly begs of her to pray for him to her only Son

that

that he may obtain the blessings laid up for those who love God.

Whence it follows, that as praying to the *Blessed Virgin* was the devotion and practice of the Church in his time; so by his saying, *that 'tis through her we obtain the pardon of our sins*, and again, *that through her we may find mercy in the day of judgment*, he only means, through her *intercessions*, to which her eminent holiness and merits give doubtless a great efficacy and weight. For it has always been the undoubted faith of the Church, 1st, That *Jesus Christ* is the only mediator of redemption; 2^{dly}, That he alone has immediate access to God, without the mediation of any other; and that, by consequence, the prayers of *saints* and *angels* in Heaven, as well as of the faithful upon earth, are all offered up through the mediation of *Jesus Christ*; and 3^{dly}, That there is no salvation but through him, according to that solemn declaration of *St. Peter*, before the priests and princes of the *Jews*, *Acts. iv.* *There is no salvation in any other, nor is there any other name under Heaven given to men, in which they can be saved.* So that the *Blessed Virgin*, in her now glorious state in Heaven, has no other part in the salvation of men, but that of *begging* and *interceding* for them. *Christ* alone is the propitiation for our sins; he alone is our mediator of reconciliation or redemption; because he alone has paid our ransom. The *Blessed Virgin* aspires to no such honour; but being placed before the throne, at the head of all the *saints* and *angels*, presents our petitions to God, and joins her prayers with ours, to render them acceptable to him. This is the part she now acts in the salvation of men; this is the ground of our trust and confidence in her; and we shall find our hopes built upon a very solid foundation,

tion, if we but consider the extraordinary favours bestowed upon her by Almighty God in this life, and the eminent rank she now holds in Heaven.

The *first* extraordinary grace then bestowed upon her was, her being elected from all eternity, to be the *mother of God*; a dignity of so high a rank, that nothing in this world ever approached near it: For by virtue of this election, she was chosen to be, next after *Christ*, the principal interest of man's redemption: By virtue of the same she was chosen to be, by the nearest relation a pure creature is capable of, the immaculate spouse of God the Father, *viz.* in becoming truly mother of him in time, who was begotten of the Father from all eternity: Hence also this great title of *Queen of Heaven*, wherewith the Church salutes her, became due to her; and by this title, we may conceive her as much above the angels and saints, as a queen is above her subjects upon earth: But since the rank allotted to each one in Heaven, is answerable to the degree he has of purity and holiness, because glory is the reward of virtue and merit; it follows, that as the *Blessed Virgin* was predestinated from all eternity, to be the *Mother of God*, and *Queen of Heaven*, so God took care to fit her for that eminent dignity, by enriching her soul with the most exquisite treasures of grace and virtues, that ever were bestowed on any pure creature.

Hence flows the *second* extraordinary favour bestowed upon her, *viz.* her being sanctified in her mother's womb, in the very moment of her conception: For which reason, she is the only saint whose *conception* as well as *nativity* is solemnized in the Church by a particular feast; because holy-days are instituted only in honour

nour of persons who died in the state of grace, at the time to which those feasts have a relation.

Whence also flows a *third* extraordinary favour, viz. her having been preserved, throughout the whole course of her life, from all spot or stain of *actual sin*. Her *reason* was never obscured by any passion; but being always subject to God, her *will* was likewise perfectly subject to her reason: She no sooner knew her divine creator by *faith*, but her will, inflamed with *charity*, broke forth into acts of praise and adoration of him: We may truly say, her heart took fire in an instant; because God's grace found no resistance in it: And as God's grace increased in her soul without intermission, because she never ceased to co-operate with it; so all virtues, and principally a most ardent love of God, received proportionably their gradual improvement, and went on increasing, during the whole course of her life: Her purity, both of mind and body, was perfectly angelical: Her conformity to the will of God, and obedience to all his holy inspirations, was equal to the love she had for him; and her charity for her neighbour, being kindled and continually nourished by the same fire of divine love, was inferior only to that which no creature can attain to, and can be attributed to God alone. So that we may truly say, that though all mankind be created to the image and likeness of God, the soul of the *Blessed Virgin*, next to the sacred humanity of *Christ*, had the most perfect resemblance of him, and came up nearest to the divine original, though still infinitely inferior to it.

But though all these virtues were possessed by her in so eminent a degree, it was her admirable

able *humility* that gave them their greatest beauty and lustre : This was properly her favourite and distinguishing virtue, which raised her above all others, and rendered her so highly acceptable to God : This was the basis and foundation of all her greatness ; for she was truly great in the eyes of God, because she appeared as nothing in her own ; that large profusion of the divine bounties on her, never surprised her into the least thought of vanity ; because the higher she was exalted by God, the lower she sunk down into the consideration of her own nothingness ; never assuming to herself the least part of the glory that was due to God alone, but returning it all back to its proper source : So that her humility was not only the nurse and guardian of all her other virtues, but a perpetual source of gratitude, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving to her bountiful benefactor.

It was thus the *Blessed Virgin* was prepared and fitted by the hands of God himself, for the high dignity of being the mother of the Redeemer of the world ; and here she received a *fourth* extraordinary and singular grace, I mean, her being overshadowed by the power and virtue of the Holy Ghost, and so remaining a pure virgin, at the same time that she became the true and natural mother of God : By virtue of which grace or privilege, she was also exempted from the curse laid upon *Eve*, and her whole sex, of bringing forth in pain ; for as she conceived by the pure virtue of the divine spirit, so she brought forth without the least violation of her virginal integrity ; though her humility was such, that she chose to pass her whole life-time for no other than an ordinary married woman : And therefore, to leave the world in this mean opinion of her, she paid an exact obedience to the law

law of *Moses*, by submitting herself to the ceremony of being purified; which, in the eyes of the world, supposes her having been defiled. But what is most stupendous, and surpasses all the examples of humility that ever have been practised by any pure creature; rather than reveal a secret, the discovery whereof would have been so glorious to her, she suffered her virtue to be suspected by the person, the dearest to her upon earth, 'till God himself vindicated her innocence, by revealing to St. *Joseph* the whole mystery of the Incarnation, and the part his blessed spouse had in it.

I pass over the rest of her life, whereof thirty years were spent in the blessed company of *Jesus*; and all passed in an uninterrupted practice of the sublimest virtue, and a continual increase of grace and merits; till God was pleased to crown them with the last singular favour, I mean, that of her glorious assumption into Heaven; where she is now seated, as I may say, nearest to the person of her dear Son; honoured by angels and saints as their queen; and cherished by God, answerably to the love she bore him, and the faithful obedience she paid him during the whole course of her life: So that her prerogative of glory is now as singular, as were those of grace before her dissolution.

Now, is there not here encouragement enough to pay a particular devotion to the *Blessed Virgin*, and repose an entire trust and confidence in her intercession? Has she not all the conditions requisite to qualify her for the office of an intercessor? Does she want either *will* to ask or *power* to obtain for us of Almighty God whatever helps we stand in need of? To doubt of her will, is to question her *charity*; which being a virtue, that not only remains, but is improved

and perfected in Heaven ; we cannot doubt but her zeal for the good of souls is far greater now than when she was on earth : Her soul burnt then with charity for her neighbour, because she loved God with her whole heart ; and since that love is more ardent now she sees God face to face ; it follows that her charity for mankind, and zeal for the salvation of souls, is now also proportionably greater : And therefore the Church styles her the *mother of mercy*, not only because he, who is essentially *goodness* and *mercy*, is the sacred fruit of her womb ; but also because she has the tenderness and merciful bowels of a mother for us. She regards us all as her children, because by the grace of baptism, we are the *adoptive sons* of God, and *brothers* of *Jesus Christ*. She loves the just, because they are conformable to the image of her Son ; and she compassionates sinners, because they are redeemed with his sacred blood : So that all may find a merciful mother in her, and one ready to interest herself in their behalf, and present their petitions to the giver of all good gifts.

Therefore, we cannot question her good will to perform this charitable office for us ; much less can we doubt of her power. Her charity alone secures us of her readiness to intercede for us ; but all her virtues, by which she was so eminently acceptable to God, plead for the efficacy of her intercession. For if St. *James* exhorts us to pray for one another, *because* (says he) *the assiduous prayer of the just avails very much*, v. 16. and that even in this life, whilst we are yet subject to many failings, how powerful then and efficacious in our behalf, must the intercession of a person, who never offended God by the least thought, word, or deed, during the whole course of her life, and is now in the highest

highest degree of faith in the court of Heaven? Nay, may we not justly look upon all those singular and extraordinary graces, which God bestowed upon her in this life, as so many assured pledges, that he will refuse her nothing, now she is triumphant with him in glory; where those virtues, which deserved so high a degree of favour upon earth, have now received their full accomplishment and perfection; and, by consequence, have rendered her still more acceptable to him?

Suppose that in the moment of her triumphant entry into glory (which after the ascension of *Christ*, was the most solemn feast that ever was celebrated in the court of Heaven) suppose, I say, that in that moment she had asked grace for any sinner, can we think God would have denied her request? And, has she not the same interest and power now, as she had then? Is she not in the same degree of favour, and will she not be so for all eternity? For we must not fancy, as if favour had its vicissitudes in Heaven, as in this world. All things are fixed and permanent in the state of bliss. Rewards and honours are distributed there, according to every one's holiness and merit: And therefore, as the *Blessed Virgin* will always surpass all saints in holiness, so will she always be most acceptable to God, and have the greatest power with him. He will always honour her as *Queen of Heaven*, and *Jesus Christ* will always regard her as his *mother*, and of all creatures the dearest to him. For which reason, he has inspired the Church to pay her extraordinary honours, and consecrate several festival days in memory of her; because, he will have his favours pass, as it were, through her hands; and render us sensible, that our petitions will never be more effectual,

than when we prevail with her to undertake the presenting of them to Almighty God, through the mediation of her dear Son. So that the true and only reason of our addressing ourselves so often to her, is, because we have a greater confidence in her prayers than our own; and in so doing, we do but justice both to her and ourselves. For we are miserable sinners, and she is a most glorious saint: We are defiled with many crimes, and she is without spot or stain: We have deserved God's wrath, by so many repeated infidelities towards him, and she has ever been his faithful servant, and never offended him by the least venial sin: And is it not then just, we should hope for a more favourable acceptance of prayers, presented by the holy and unspotted hands of the immaculate mother of God, than when we ourselves present them to Almighty God.

We read in the holy scripture, that God commanded *Job's friends* to go to him, and desire him to pray for them; because God was angry with them, and would not have regarded their prayers, unless *Job* had interceded for them. And ought not we then also, who in all likelihood are upon no better terms with Almighty God, than *Job's friends* were; ought we not, I say, to endeavour to make an interest with some powerful intercessor, some select friend of God, such as the *Blessed Virgin* is, to pray for us, lest our prayers should be unacceptable to him? This certainly, is not only the most pious and most humble, but the most effectual course that we can take. For if, by a sincere devotion, and assiduous application to her, we can but render her our patroness, and advocate to her Son, there is nothing we may not hope for from his mercy. We cannot put our eternal interest into
better

better hands, than by engaging her to favour our cause, who has the greatest power with him; from whom alone we must expect the relief of all our necessities in this life, and a share in his eternal joys hereafter.

THE FIFTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED, AND SOME DIRECTIONS RELATING TO IT.

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Luke i. 28.

THERE is no devotion so solid and well grounded, but may be rendered fruitless by our own fault. It will not therefore be improper to give some directions relating to the devotion I have spoken of, which shall be the subject of this discourse.

I have sometimes read in books, and heard in sermons, that the true and solid devotion to the *Blessed Virgin* consists in the imitation of her virtues. I must own indeed, this is the perfectest, but I cannot think it to be the only devotion to her: For if it be the only true one, they who are not yet imitators of her virtues, are utterly excluded from having any part in the practice of this devotion: And yet these are the persons, who stand most in need of being exhorted and encouraged to it: Because as they are further out of the way of salvation, they stand more in need of a special grace to bring them into it; and, by consequence, of some powerful advocate, near the throne of grace, to plead their cause, and intercede for them.

It is certainly for this reason, that the *Blessed Virgin*, in the litanies composed in honour of her,

her, is stiled *The refuge of sinners*: And how will this title be verified of her, if the just alone be allowed to be the number of her votaries? How will sinners find a refuge in her, if they are not to be encouraged to fly to her for sanctuary, and put themselves under her protection? 'Tis true they are not yet imitators of her virtues: But must they despair of ever being so? Must they not desire, and endeavour to become, what as yet they are not? Now 'tis by a constant devotion to her, and daily imploring the assistance of her prayers, they must hope to be at last admitted into the happy number. For which reason, instead of asserting that our devotion to the *Blessed Virgin* is to consist in the imitation of her virtues; it seems to me more proper to say, that the imitation of her virtues, is the mark we ought to set before us, and the end we ought to aim at in our whole practice of devotion to her: And therefore we must make a large difference between two sorts of sinners. The *first* is of those, who not only are sinners, but seem resolved to continue so; at least, use no serious endeavours, nor discover any desire to be delivered from their sinful state. The *second* is of those, who are sinners indeed, and as yet subject to many relapses; yet are very sensible of their unhappy condition, and desire sincerely to come out of it.

Now, as to the *first*, I have but little encouragement to give them, notwithstanding any pretended devotion to the *Blessed Virgin*, till there appears a sincere desire to correct their lives, and some serious efforts, at least, towards the putting it in execution. For, if there be any so far misled, as to imagine they shall be saved by the intercession of the *Blessed Virgin*, without quitting their habits of sin, so they be
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but constant to certain forms of devotion to her; I must assure them their devotion is no better than a cheat, and will avail them just as much as to say, *Lord, Lord!* without ever intending to keep his commandments.

It is true, the *Blessed Virgin* is the *refuge of sinners*, but not the encourager of sin. She is a sanctuary for those, who, with contrite and humble hearts, fly from God's justice to his mercy; but she pretends not to receive under her protection, professed and incorrigible rebels. *Finally*, she refuses not to be the advocate of those, who, terrified with the number and enormity of their sins, implore her intercession; provided they dispose themselves to deserve this favour, by aiming at a serious change of life; to which end, all their prayers and devotions to her must be directed; and since this appears to be the disposition of the second sort of sinners, mentioned by me; I cannot say enough to encourage them to continue their devotions to her; and hope well of the success: For, whatever their sins may be, since they have a sincere desire and intention to quit them, this disposition cannot but come from God; and a constant practice of such devotions as are approved of, and recommended by the Church, cannot but be a powerful means to improve it by degrees, and bring it at last to the perfection they aim at; which they must always keep in view, that they may be always advancing towards it: So that although they begin their devotions to the *Blessed Virgin*, in a state very unconformable to her holiness and purity, they may hope, by the continuance of them, to be transformed into new creatures, and in the end become conformable to her, in the imitation of her virtues.

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This, therefore, is the great rule of all sorts of devotions; whether to the *Blessed Virgin*, or any other saint, *viz.* whatever devotion is conducing to the amendment of our lives, and directed to that end, cannot but be solid, and acceptable to God. But if, on the contrary, any devotion be, through abuse, made an encouragement to continue in sin, it ought to be regarded as a delusion, or stratagem of the devil. And therefore, if there be any (as I can scarce think there are) who promise salvation to Christians, for the bare practice of certain external forms of devotion, though they should run on in their habits of sin, to their very last sickness, this is not the doctrine of the Church, but detested by her: Which therefore ought not to hinder the faithful from practising any form of devotion, not disapproved by the Church, because they may profit by what is really good in it, if they be punctual in performing all the rules of it, and depend no farther upon it, than as it is a means to obtain God's grace to resist sin, and advance in virtue: For, 'tis most certain, that as far as any devotion contributes to this end, and has an influence upon the leading a good life, so far it is to be recommended: And just so far, and no farther, a hope of salvation may be built upon the practice of it.

I will now speak briefly of the devotions, against which no exception can be made. The *first* is, never to begin, or end the day, without putting ourselves under the protection of the *Blessed Virgin*, by saying some short prayer, in honour of her: For we must all regard her as our mother in *Jesus Christ*; and therefore, as children ask blessing of their parents regularly twice a day, so we must make it our constant practice, not to let the morning or evening pass,

pass, without having first obtained a blessing of her. The angelical salutation, the office and litanies composed in honour of her, are to be preferred before all other vocal devotions; as being of the greatest authority, and recommended by the universal practice of the Church.

The *second* is a devout observance of the feasts ordained in honour of her. These are all solemn days in the Church, and to be kept with a devotion answerable to the intention of their institution. All those then that have a zeal for her honour, and aspire to be in the number of her true servants, must be eager to testify it on those days, and distinguish themselves by a more than ordinary piety; and particularly, by a worthy frequentation of the holy sacraments. For as those, who seek to insinuate themselves into the favour of any prince, besides their making their daily court, take care to appear before him on certain solemn days in rich new clothes; so if we will gain the favour of the Queen of Heaven, besides our daily devotions, we must not fail to make our court on her festival days; by giving the same marks, in a spiritual manner, of our zeal and respect for her: Our old clothes therefore, that is our old habits of sin, will suit very ill with the solemnity of those days: *The old man must be put off with his acts, and the new man put on; who is created according to God, in justice and holiness*: that so we may appear at the public service of the Church, *renewed in the spirit of the mind*, as St. Paul speaks; that is, adorned in the soul with sanctifying grace: And so her feasts will both be kept holy by us, and we ourselves shall be made holy by keeping of them.

The third and last devotion I shall speak of, is that of the *rosary* or *beads*; which, whether

we consider the prayers whereof it is composed, or the method observed in the saying of them, will appear not only profitable, but admirable in its institution: Since by means of it, if performed methodically, and with attention, the mind is weekly carried through all the principal mysteries of man's redemption, and has an opportunity of making as often an acknowledgment to *Christ*, for all he has done and suffered for us: But there is also this peculiar advantage in it, that it is a devotion suited to all capacities and states; for a traveller may perform it on the road, a labourer at his work, a tradesman in his shop, a gentleman in his walks of pleasure, and a sick man confined to his bed; and even the most ignorant are as fully qualified for the performance of it, as the most learned divine.

If it be objected, that repeating the same prayer so often over is tedious, and apt to cause coldness and distraction in the mind, which stands in need of variety, to keep it awake and attentive: I answer, that the coldness or distraction occasioned by repeating the same prayer often over, is either voluntary or involuntary; if voluntary, then it is our own fault; and we have it in our power to correct it: If involuntary, then there is no fault at all, nor harm done; for our prayers will nevertheless have their full effect: However, it is much to be feared, that this coldness, distraction, and tediousness, in repeating the same prayer often over, proceeds mostly from our not being sufficiently sensible of our necessities and wants. Do we not see beggars in the streets, repeating the same request to all that pass by, over and over again, from morning till night? For they study no variety: And yet this repetition of the same form of words hinders not, but that they are very intent upon
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the business they are about; because, being heartily sensible of their necessitous condition, they are never weary of desiring and asking a relief: In the same manner, therefore, if we had as deep a sense of the necessities of our souls, and as eager a desire to receive a constant relief from Heaven, as beggars have to receive an alms: we should have no difficulty to ask it fifty times over, with the same attention as once; nor ever grow weary of soliciting, though in the same form of words, to obtain that which we never cease to want.

But they who are enemies to the beads, tell us, that in saying them, we pray ten times more to the *Blessed Virgin* than to Almighty God; but this is a gross mistake, as I will demonstrate by a clear example.

If I should put a request into the hands of any person, and desire him to present it for me to the king; I ask, whether my chief request be to him whom I employ to present it, or to the king to whom it is to be delivered? The question answers itself. In like manner, therefore, when we pray thus, *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, now, and in the hour of our death*, and repeat this ten times over, 'tis plain, that all we beg of the *Blessed Virgin*, is to present our requests to Almighty God: So that although we address ourselves immediately to her, our prayers are not only chiefly to God, but, to speak properly, to God alone; as the request I have spoken of is made to the king alone, though another be desired to deliver it to him; and, in effect, we pray no otherwise to the *Blessed Virgin*, than we pray to one another, when we recommend ourselves to one another's prayer.

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It is true, we call it *praying to the Blessed Virgin*, and *praying to the Saints*, when we implore the assistance of their prayers; because custom, which is wholly arbitrary, has made it the common way of speaking to call it so: And if it were the custom to call it *praying to one another*, when we desire one another's prayer, the expression would be full as proper; and yet the thing would be the same it is now; so that call it what you please, either *praying to the Blessed Virgin*, or *praying the Blessed Virgin*, the meaning is no other, than that we desire her to pray with us, and for us; to join her prayers with ours; to be a fellow-petitioner with us; and, in a word, to present our petitions to God, to render them more acceptable to him.

Which also fully answers the common frivolous objection, *viz.* that *we are all commanded to come to Christ*: For if this text forbids our desiring the *Blessed Virgin* to pray for us, it likewise forbids our desiring one another's prayers; which is absurd. I answer therefore, that by desiring the *Blessed Virgin* to pray with us, and for us, to *Christ*, we not only come to him ourselves, but we also engage his *Blessed Mother* to come with us; since, 'tis plain, whatever form of words we use to implore her intercession, 'tis plain, I say, that all our hearts desires are directed to God; that our confidence of obtaining grace and salvation is wholly in God; that all our expectation is from God, through *Jesus Christ*: Finally, that we desire no more of the *Blessed Virgin*, than we daily desire of one another, *viz.* the assistance of her prayers.

Now suppose we do this fifty times a day, by repeating so often the angelical salutation (which we call, saying a pair of beads) suppose, I say, we do this fifty times a day, or oftener, is it not
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so much the better? For since, to desire the prayers of others is a mark of humility, and a tacit acknowledgment that we have a greater opinion of their virtue than of our own, 'tis still a mark of a greater humility to repeat this request often, and therefore, if it be good to say once, *Holy Mary, pray for us*, there can be no exception made against the frequent repetition of it. This I am sure of, that to deny the lawfulness of desiring a share in the *Blessed Virgin's* prayers, and at the same time to allow, the lawfulness of desiring sinners upon earth to pray for us, is a manifest contradiction to common sense.

We are therefore bound to bless God, for not having been brought up in an error, which would deprive us of the benefit of having so glorious a saint in Heaven to intercede for us. For, whether we consider the eminent graces which God has so liberally bestowed upon her, or the exact fidelity with which she corresponded to all his graces, we cannot but regard her as a person so acceptable to God, that he will refuse her nothing she shall ask of him for the good of our souls. Then again, when we consider, that she has carried him, who is *Goodness* and *Mercy* itself, for nine months together in her womb; and that she always carried him in her heart, as the sole object of her love, we cannot but conclude, that she herself has received, in all that time, so ample a portion of those virtues, that it is to do her the greatest injustice, not to regard her as a most merciful and tender mother to all those who stand in need of, and cry out to her for assistance.

These then are the grounds upon which our devotion to the *Blessed Virgin* is built, these the reasons why we so often importune her to pray
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234. MORAL ENTERTAINMENTS.

for us. If they who blame us for it, either think her not charitable enough to interest herself in our behalf, or not powerful enough to obtain any thing for us, or perhaps think themselves to have as good an interest with *Christ* as his *blessed Mother*; let us, at least, be far from entertaining either so mean an opinion of her, or so proud a one of ourselves; let us acknowledge her to be the *Mother of mercy*; and of all creatures, the most acceptable to God; let us also own the unworthiness of our own prayers: and therefore, since on the one hand, we have no hopes of salvation but from the pure goodness of God, through the mediation of *Jesus Christ*, and are sensible on the other, that by the multitude and grievousness of our sins, who have deserved to be rejected by him; let us never cease to importune the *blessed Mother of God* to intercede for us, that we may find mercy at his hands; nor ever pass a day without offering to her from time to time, this short, but excellent prayer: *Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and in the hour of our death.* Amen.

THE FIFTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE PARABLE OF THE SEED.

The sower went out to sow his seed. Luke viii. 5.

THE parable I am going to explain, is thus proposed by *Christ*; *The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it: And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture: And some fell among thorns;*

thorns; and the thorns sprung up with it, and choaked it: And other fell on good ground, and sprung up, and bear fruit an hundred-fold.

This is the parable; and the principal drift of it is to mark out three several causes, by which the seed of the word of God, as Christ himself explains it, is rendered fruitless; that is, three several objects to salvation, represented under the figure of the seed's falling, *by the way side*, upon a rock, and amongst thorns. The first is thus set forth by Christ; *Some of the seed fell by the way side, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it*: Which he explains thus; *They who were by the way side, are those who hear the word; then comes the devil, and takes it out of their hearts, lest believing they should be saved.*

Here we have the character of *obdurate sinners*, and the power the devil has over them, set forth in lively colours: Christ compares them to that ground which lies near the high-way, and is usually trod hard into a path, by the number of passengers that walk upon it: Now, whatever seed falls upon this ground, is certainly lost; *First*, Because by reason of its hardness it cannot so much as enter into the earth, much less be covered deep enough to take root; and, *secondly*, Because it is either trodden upon, or eaten up by the *fowls of the air*: In the same manner, the seed of the divine word is lost upon the hearts of *obdurate sinners*: It falls indeed upon them; for *they hear the word*, as Christ says, and this renders them inexcusable before God, because, hearing it, they give no attention to it; but are of the number of those, who say to God in their hearts, *We will not have the knowledge of thy ways*: However, the Father of mercies ceases not to speak to them by his holy inspirations,

inspirations, and they have reflection enough to perceive them, and know them to be the voice of God that calls upon them : But they refuse to entertain them ; they will not let them enter their hearts, for fear they should fasten upon them, and disturb them in their criminal pleasures.

This is their unhappy disposition ; and tho' it be, of its own nature, obstacle enough to the grace that speaks interiorly to them ; yet *Christ* attributes it chiefly to the power the *devil* has over them, who is watchful to nourish this disposition, and harden them in it : *They hear the word*, says *Christ* ; *then comes the devil, and takes it out of their hearts* : He is jealous of his prey, and will not trust them wholly to themselves ; but keeps assiduous about them, to hinder the seed of God's word from working any good effect upon their souls ; and therefore, as soon as any good thought, or truth relating to their eternal interest, presents itself to their minds, the devil is ready to snatch it immediately from their hearts ; *lest, believing, they should be saved*, or lest by ruminating upon it, and giving it time to make an impression, they should think seriously of a change, and break loose from the chains that keep them in bondage.

But since it is to be hoped, there are not many in this abandoned and reprobate state ; the whole subject of this entertainment shall be some directions, relating to the two other obstacles to salvation, which are far more common, marked out in the parable.

The *second* hindrance to salvation, or cause which renders the *seed of God's word* fruitless, is thus characterised by *Christ* : *And some fell upon a rock ; and growing up, it withered, because it wanted moisture*. By the word *rock* is understood

flood a *rocky* or *stony ground*; for if seed were sown upon a *bare rock*, it would lie naked upon the surface of it, and it were impossible it should grow up at all: And therefore St. *Matthew*, Chap. xiii. Ver. 5. delivers this part of the same parable in these terms. *Some part of the seed fell upon stony places, where it had not much earth; and forthwith it sprung up, because it had no deepness of earth*: For seed which is but thinly covered with earth, shoots up much sooner than that which falls deep into the earth: But as it has a quicker growth, so it also dies sooner; because it has not moisture enough to nourish the green corn, which is soon dried up with the heat of the sun.

This is the second part of the parable; and our Saviour explains it in the following manner; *They who are sown upon a rock, are those who, when they have heard the word, received it with joy: And these have no root; they believe for a time, and go back in time of temptation*. You see here a manifest difference between this character and the former: For those of the former character only *hear the word*, but *receive it not*; because they are *hard*, and *the devil comes and takes it immediately out of their hearts*: But these not only *hear the word*, but *receive it*; nay, *receive it with joy*: It makes an impression upon them; they lament their sins many times with tears, as St. *Gregory* observes: But what is the fruit of it? Alas; *they have no root*: It shoots up immediately, and withers soon after; producing nothing but barren desires, and purposes without effect: All their fervour is no more than a sudden flash, that vanishes in a moment: It is but a transient fit of devotion, which passes almost as soon as it is kindled, and their tears are like those of children, soon excited, and dried

dried up as soon, with the temptation of some pleasing trifle that is offered to their fancy.

Finally, as soft bodies are the most easily susceptible of impressions, but lose them with the same ease as they received them; so the persons described in this second character, having no solidity, that is, no steadiness in their hearts; though they *receive the word with joy*, and are tenderly affected with it for a time, yet they are as ready to part with it, as they were ready to receive it: So that, upon the first difficulty they meet with, or temptation that assaults them, all the fruit that might have been expected from those sensible impressions, miscarries; their good purposes are forgot, and they return to their customary weakness, in the same manner as if they never had been made at all: And so their lives pass in a continual circle of rising and falling; of making good resolutions one day, and breaking them the next; of projecting many things, and going through with nothing.

Hence it appears plainly, that the *second* cause of spiritual barrenness, marked out in this parable, is properly the vice of *inconstancy*; which though it be not so bad as *hardness of heart*, is notwithstanding, an absolute obstacle to salvation: For unless this evil be effectually remedied, and the soul fixed upon such solid principles, as to render her firm and steady in the duties of a Christian life, 'tis impossible the great work of salvation should ever be accomplished; nay, our very best resolutions will prove abortive, and the most religious designs come to nothing.

We must therefore search into the root of this distemper, and then consider what is proper for its cure: Now some attribute it to a natural levity, or fickleness of temper: But this being
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only a defect or weakness of nature, persons may be subject to it in trivial or indifferent matters, and yet be very firm and steady in all duties God requires of them: Because, if the law of God, and principles of faith, be their rule; as that is fixed and unchangeable, their practice guided by it will be so too: Others therefore ascribe it to a want of *faith*: But tho' *constancy* cannot be without faith, yet *faith* may be without constancy; because a foundation may be laid, and no superstructure raised upon it. It is true, if all believers were like St. Paul's just man, who *lives by faith*, then all who had his virtue would likewise have a sufficient degree of Christian constancy, to carry them steadily on through all the difficulties and necessary trials of virtue: But the case is quite otherwise; for many Christians are sound in faith, but very corrupt in their manners: And 'tis for this reason, that as their sins are more enormous than those of infidels, who never had the light of faith, so will their punishment be also more severe; because, having been illuminated from above, they have not followed the light God has bestowed upon them, nor conformed their lives to the faith they professed. Faith therefore is not properly wanting to them, but they are wanting to their faith: They believe like Christians, but act as unbelievers; in permitting every temptation to divert them from the pursuit of virtue, and put them out of the way of salvation.

But what then is the cause of this extraordinary weakness, in the important concerns of eternity; which, if men were guilty of it in temporal matters of any consequence, would expose them to contempt and laughter? I answer that the true root of their inconstancy, is
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no other than some predominant passion, or habit, which inclines them strongly to what is forbid, and gives them a violent repugnance to what is commanded. The reason hereof is clear; because, whoever is not possessed with any passion, which inclines him strongly to evil, and gives him an aversion to his duty, will have no great difficulty to avoid the one, and perform the other. Now, 'tis not probable, that a person who is not wholly lost to principles of conscience and religion, will be guilty of frequent trespasses, either in doing what he is bound to avoid, or omitting what he is bound to do; if obeying the law of God, and performing his duty, be not very painful to him. When therefore, his transgressions are very frequent, notwithstanding his reiterated purposes to the contrary, 'tis an evident mark that the difficulty of obeying is very great. And what can be the root of this difficulty or repugnance, but some passion, which not finding its account in the performance of his duty, is importunate and pressing to be gratified, even in contradiction to the law of God?

It is true indeed, as long as any passion lies dormant, as it often does, the making of good purposes, and forming designs of amendment, costs nothing. But when this claim is over, and the passion, awakened by some violent temptation, begins again to grow importunate and craving for a compliance; then the person who before thought he should do every thing, and made the best purposes in the world, does just nothing at all; but yields tamely to its importunity; and is again, as much, if not more a slave to it, than he was before. For how should a person ever go on steady in the way of virtue, as long as he has a strong weight or bias upon
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his heart, which is continually drawing him another way? Now every passion is as a weight or bias upon the heart, which draws and presses it towards its proper object: And though the party that labours under it may make some weak efforts, from time to time, to resist its violence; as long as that passion keeps its hold, his struggling will be but like the languid and drowsy endeavours of a person overwhelmed with sleep; who scarce raises himself up, but drops down again.

This therefore is the general root of that changeableness and inconstancy of mind, by which sinners are so often diverted from executing the best resolutions they make for their eternal good. This is properly that *rock* or *strong ground*, which hinders the *seed of God's word* from entering deep into their hearts, and becoming fruitful in good works; and whilst this *rock* subsists, no good can be expected of them. They may *receive the word with joy*; they may be tenderly affected with it, and shew a willingness to obey it; nay, form designs in their mind, to undertake and carry on effectually the work of their eternal salvation; but till that passion be banished from their hearts, the seed of the divine word can take no root; all their good purposes will be blasted; all their designs miscarry; their very best inclinations will remain fruitless; and they will ever remain the same fickle and inconstant creatures; ever false to themselves and to God, ever promising, and never performing, ever beginning, and never finishing any thing they are about.

This, I say, will be their condition, as long as they are over-ruled by any passion: And therefore, the only effectual remedy of their inconstancy is to destroy that passion, which is the
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root of it. But how must that be done? For here lies the difficulty: It is certain, in the *first* place, that their chief trust and confidence must be in God; if this principle be not deeply fixed in their hearts, all their endeavours will be vain. *Secondly*, It is no less certain, that notwithstanding their entire trust and confidence in God, they must labour no less heartily themselves, than if the whole success depended upon their own industry and application. And, *Thirdly*, it is evident, from experience, that no passion can be subdued, unless it be starved out, and every thing removed from it that gives strength and nourishment to it. These three principles joined together, will put them into the method established by God's providence; and oblige them to make use of all the general and particular remedies their condition stands in need of.

The general ones, in consequence to the principles established, are humble and fervent prayer, a daily examination of conscience, the use of the sacraments, keeping out of idleness, and avoiding the usual occasions of relapses: These are all excellent means, to weaken by degrees, the inclination or passion, though ever so perverse and obstinate in its nature; provided they be performed with such a serious application, as gives ground to judge, that the parties concerned are in earnest: For if, in performing the duties of prayer, and other devotions mentioned, they seldom go beyond the outward form; 'tis all children's play, and no more than a mock fight, or shooting at the enemy with powder, which makes a noise, but does no execution: And therefore 'tis no wonder, if these prescriptions prove often ineffectual: The fault lies not in the remedies, but in the persons, who

who content themselves with the outward form, but neglect the inward dispositions, with which they are to be made use of.

As to particular remedies, the parties concerned must be, in a great measure, their own physicians, and prescribe to themselves: Because, since no man can understand the particular nature of their prevailing passion, so well as themselves; it follows, that they themselves, if they will but proceed sincerely, are the best judges of what is most proper to be applied to it. Experience has taught them the secret springs, by which it moves, the objects that inflame it, the first symptoms of an approaching temptation, the degrees by which it works upon the imagination, the remote and immediate occasions of relapses, and how the immediate ones are ushered in by those that are more remote. The experimental knowledge they have of all these things, will be their best guide to direct them what to do, and what to avoid, in many particular cases; in which their confessors can do no more, than to give them general rules; that they must be watchful to resist the very first beginning of temptations, and keep at the greatest distance possible from every thing that contributes to inflame, or nourish the distemper: For though many of these may be innocent in themselves, at least not directly sinful, yet they are always leading to sin, in respect of the persons I speak of; who, if they be not careful to avoid them when they have it in their power, will often find themselves drawn into the snare, before they are aware of it; because the remote occasions will insensibly draw on the immediate ones, and then the temptation will prevail, and all the good purposes they have made will signify nothing.

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I will now speak briefly of the *third* and last cause of spiritual barrenness, or obstacle to salvation, marked out in the following words, *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns growing up together with the corn, choaked it.* Which is thus expounded by *Christ*: *But that which fell among thorns, are they who have heard the word, but with the solitudes, the riches and pleasures of life, going are choaked, and bring forth no fruit.* The word *going*, imports the same as, *by degrees*; or *in process of time*: Because, the thorns that grow up with corn, choak it not all at once, but gradually: And when our Saviour says, that the persons marked out in this part of the parable, *are they who hear the word*, we must add to it according to a learned interpreter, *and receive it*, nay, receive it in such a manner, that it even takes deep root in their hearts, and would grow up to its full ripeness, were it not choaked by the *thorns* that *grow up with it*. For corn is in no danger of being spoiled by weeds, till it be considerably grown up. So that the persons represented in this character, approach still some degrees nearer than the former, to the happy state of those who are signified by the *good ground*, which *brings forth an hundred fold*. For the *word* is both heard and received by them, it enters into their hearts, it takes root, it grows up to a considerable height, and yet, for want of some pains and care, to pluck up the thorns that grow with it, it is choaked by degrees, and bring forth no fruit. *Going they are choaked.*

But what are the *thorns*, which choak the growing corn? *St. Luke* mentions three; the *solitudes*, the *riches*, and *pleasures* of life: But *St. Matthew* reduces them to two, *solitudes* and *riches*: Because *riches*, considered as an obstacle
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to falvation, include *pleasures*, as being the means by which they are procured.

For riches would not hinder falvation, but rather facilitate and promote it, were they not abused by their possessors, in being made instrumental to those pleasures which draw their hearts from God, and link them insensibly to this world: The same is to be said of the *solicitudes* of this life; they are *thorns* to the soul, when they engage the heart so wholly in their interest, as to take it off from the concerns of a better life: For then, though the seeds of piety and virtue were once deeply laid, they are stifled in the crowd and hurry of temporal affairs, and in the end *bring forth no fruit*.

This is the moral of this part of the parable, and it sets forth in lively colours, the character of those unfortunate Christians, who, after a virtuous education, and considerable progress in the way of everlasting happiness, entering into the world, are by degrees corrupted by it. *Going, they are choaked*, either by being engaged in a multitude of affairs, which encumbers them with *solicitudes*, and leave no room for the concerns of their souls, or by giving themselves over to its *pleasures*, which gain ground insensibly upon their affections, and exclude the love of God, by the same degrees as they introduce that of the world: So that *solicitudes* and *pleasures*, though things of a different nature, agree in being equally, by their excess, an obstacle to the growth of virtue. The *solicitudes* of the world fill the heart, and its *pleasures* corrupt it; and both the one and the other infuse a worldly spirit, inconsistent with the spirit of God, The misfortune of those, who are lost by an excess of *solicitude*, is mostly occasioned by their having too much business; and the ruin of those, who

are corrupted with pleasures, is mostly owing to their having no business at all: Though both parties might find a middle way to steer their course in, between these two rocks, without splitting upon either: For, as to your men of business, if avarice or ambition were not consulted, a great part of that business, which overcharges men with solicitude, and makes them forget Almighty God, might be retrenched; and then they would find time enough for the performance of such Christian duties, as would be a means, not only to preserve the love of God in their hearts, but to sanctify even their temporal employments, and consecrate all that to God, which is usually, sacrificed to covetousness and pride.

But as to those, who under pretence of having no business at all, run into the opposite excuse of diversions and pleasures, to murder time, which would otherwise lie heavy upon their hands, these persons cannot deny, at least, but that they have one necessary and indispensable business to do, which is, the saving of their souls; and the more time and leisure they have for it, the more inexcusable they are if they neglect it. What reasonable pretence can hinder them from assisting daily at the *holy Sacrifice*, when they have the opportunity to do it? What can hinder them from saying daily the short office of our *Blessed Lady*, and the penitential *psalms*, with the long litanies; and spending one half hour at least in spiritual reading, besides a short half hour allotted for their evening prayers? These duties, constantly performed, will daily cut off between two or three hours from idleness, and discharge them of a part of that time, which is a burden to them: If the prescription appears disagreeable, it is a sign their souls are
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very much indisposed, and stand highly in need of it.

However, since notwithstanding all this, there will still remain many vacant hours, and but too many indeed, to be wholly thrown away upon pleasures; means may be found to prevent this loss, in such a manner as cannot be said to be inconsistent with a Christian life: For though the persons here chiefly spoken of, are not, as I suppose, under a necessity of seeking any lucrative employment, to gain a livelihood; yet I can see no reason to excuse them from an obligation of applying themselves to something that is serious, either for their own improvement, or the service of their neighbour. Has Almighty God given them no talent of which he will demand an account at the last day? As to the ladies, they are usually brought up to some work, suitable to their condition, in which they may employ their vacant hours, in a very Christian manner. And as to the gentlemen (though many of them have no particular calling, which, however, is a very great misfortune) I presume at least they are not wholly incapable of some serious business: For I suppose they can, at least, read and write; and how much time may be profitably spent this way, if not for others, at least for themselves? They may likewise amuse themselves with some handicraft or mechanical employment, as many persons of quality do, for no other end, than to keep themselves out of idleness, or such parties of pleasure as seldom keep within the bounds of what is innocent, even when they are not absolutely sinful in themselves.

If they say, they are not of an humour to set themselves to any serious employment; they may as well say, they are not of an humour to live

like Christians: They are not of an humour to do penance for their sins: In fine, they are not of an humour to save their souls. For that is the plain *English* of it: Since it is certain, that as long as their hearts and affections are running mad after the pleasures of this world, they will not only never be of an humour to do any thing that is serious, but the commandments themselves, and all the most essential duties of a Christian life, will at least be sacrificed to sloth and pleasure.

But it is now time to end; and since great numbers are concerned in this latter part of the parable, I mean all those who are either too busy, or too idle, to apply themselves to the concerns of their souls; the best advice I can give them is to consider seriously, that time is short; that there is an eternity to come; that Heaven is not to be obtained, but by the practice of such means as *Christ* has prescribed; that the *solicitudes* and *pleasures* of life, if not moderated by a Christian prudence, are declared by him, to be obstacles to salvation: Finally, that every thing is to be looked upon as vanity and folly, which, though pleasing for the present to our inclinations, puts us in danger of perishing eternally.

THE FIFTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SIN OF CONCEALMENT IN CONFESSION.

Jesus was casting out a devil, and it was dumb.
Luke xi. 14.

THE person, out of whom *Christ* cast the *dumb devil*, here spoken of, was only possessed in body: But there are but too many in the world

world possessed in soul, by the same evil spirit. Among these we may reckon all such, as out of sloth or shame, defer from time to time to have recourse to the sacrament of Penance: The neglect whereof affords their enemy opportunity to fortify himself so strongly in their souls, that it becomes very difficult to dislodge him.

But none are more fully under the tyrannical power of the *dumb devil*, than those unhappy Christians, who overcome with shame, chuse to prophane the most sacred mysteries of religion, and continue under the burden of an oppressed conscience, by wilfully concealing some sin, or aggravating circumstance of it, rather than give glory to God, and ease to their own souls, by an humble discharge of this duty: And, how infinitely more deplorable is the condition of these persons, than if their bodies were delivered up to Satan, to be tormented by him? For all this might be, without prejudice to their eternal happiness, because their own wills might have no share in it: But these unhappy wretches are the wilful authors of their own misfortune. They are under the power of the devil, because they are resolved to be so: They are dumb, not for want of power, but of will, to speak: And though they have the means of their deliverance always ready at hand, if they will but open their mouths to receive the benefit of it, they chuse to continue under their bondage, rather than give themselves the trouble of a momentary humiliation, to be delivered from it.

Since therefore, the undergoing the humiliation of confessing all our sins, is an indispensable duty, I shall treat of it at large, in this and the following discourse; intending to represent the greatness of the *sin*, as well as *folly*, a person

on commits in concealing any thing that is considerable in Confession : The folly of it shall be shewed in my next discourse ; and at present, I shall only explain the proper nature and aggravations of it.

To conceal a sin in confession, is a crime of that nature, that we cannot doubt but the devil himself is the great promoter of it : He has a double aim in tempting men to it : *First*, to gratify his own pride and malice, to which nothing is more insupportable than the humble confessions of repenting sinners ; and, *2dly*, to perpetuate the slavery of those whom he has already in his power ; well knowing, that if he can but get them into this snare he is secure of them : We may therefore be well assured, that whenever the shame of confessing any sin begins to gain ground so far upon us, as to put us upon deliberating whether we shall or shall not do our duty, 'tis the devil suggests these dangerous thoughts ; 'tis the mortal enemy of our soul's endeavours to tie up our tongues, that the hands of mercy may be for ever shut against us ; 'tis the father of lies makes us ashamed of what alone can procure us a solid glory. *The devil (says St. Chrysostome) inverts the order established by God : For the order established by him is, that we should be ashamed to sin, and glory in confessing our sins ; The devil inverts this order, and gives us a confidence to sin, and a shame to confess.*

Whilst he tempts men to sin, 'tis his business to make them throw off all shame ; this being one of the greatest restraints Almighty God has laid upon human nature : But when the sin is accomplished, and the party concerned begins to look back with a heavy heart upon the offence he has committed, then the devil returns
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upon him with new snares, and instead of robbing him of shame, as before, he heightens it as much as he can; instead of hiding from him the deformity of his sin, he sets it in the broadest light before him, and represents it under the most frightful aggravations; not to raise in his heart a penitential abhorrence of it, but to overwhelm him with such an excessive confusion for what he has done, the difficulty of confessing becoming insupportable, it may engage him in a desperate resolution of either utterly abandoning the sacrament of Penance, the only sanctuary left to secure his return to God, or, what is worse, to play the hypocrite, and impose upon his confessor.

This is the devil's ordinary stratagem, which has ever brought him in such a plentiful harvest of souls, that it is no wonder he should still continue to practice the same cheat upon us: But the great wonder is, that Christians, who have light, both of faith and reason to guide them, should be so easily drawn into the snare, and induced to commit a sin, attended with so many aggravations; that we may properly call it a complication of many crimes, wrapt up in one single act.

For, *First*, the party concerned is guilty of *sacrilege*; that is, the abuse of a sacrament instituted by *Christ* to restore grace to his soul; and this abuse is but the fore-runner of another of a much blacker nature, *viz.* a sacrilegious communion, which follows of course.

2dly, He is guilty of *hypocrisy*, in making use of a solemn act of religion to cover a sin; in masking a diabolical pride with a counterfeit humility; in affecting to appear most religiously devout, when he is most sacrilegiously wicked: And, finally, in pretending a repentance

ance for sins past, when he is both actually increasing his former guilt, and designing soon after to add to it another most grievous sin.

3dly, He is guilty of *ingratitude*, in despising the greatest pledges of God's goodness towards him, and frustrating, as far as in him lies, the designs of his mercy; nay, using his blessings as arms to fight against him.

However, these are but the inseparable circumstances of this sin; but its proper and specific malice, consists in being a wilful and premeditated *lying to the Holy Ghost*: For the better understanding whereof, it is to be observed, that when a *priest* officiates in the *sacred tribunal of Penance*, he acts there as God's representative, and public minister of *Jesus Christ*. Now whatever affront is offered to a public minister, especially when he acts as such, reflects upon him whose minister he is: So that the behaviour of a person, presenting himself before the minister of *Christ*, in order to treat with him about the important concern of salvation, and the making a solid and lasting peace with God; his behaviour, I say, is to be considered no otherwise, than as if *Christ* himself were visibly present to him: And, by consequence, all dissimulation and double-dealing used with a confessor, during the actual administration of his sacred function, is imposing upon God himself; and *lying to the one*, is the same as *lying to the other*.

Now, to proceed gradually in shewing the nature of this sin, let us first consider, how hateful all sorts of *lying* is to God. *There are six things* (says *Solomon*, Prov. vi, 16.) *which God hates*; and the second of these is a *lying tongue*: Again, in his 12th chapter, he tells us that *lying lips are an abomination to the Lord*: And therefore,

therefore, in the 30th chapter, he humbly prays to God to *remove from him all lying words*. Now the reason hereof seems to be, because *lying* is directly opposite to one of God's attributes, to wit, *truth*: And since he cannot but love his own divine perfections, it follows, that he cannot but hate whatever is directly opposite to any of them.

But to be more fully convinced of the hatred God bears to *lying*, let us consider how odious a quality it is accounted even amongst men: For though man's reason be much obscured by the sin he brings into the world, and the numberless passions it gives birth to, which are as so many dark clouds about the soul; yet, amidst this darkness, every one has still light enough to discern, in some measure, the beauty and loveliness of truth; and the same glimpse of light, by which we see the admirable beauty of this virtue, discovers at the same time the deformity of its opposite vice: Whence it is, that all men in the world naturally hate a *lying tongue*; for proof whereof I need but offer this familiar instance, that no man, tender of his credit, can bear the imputation of it; and that one of the greatest affronts that can be put upon a man of honour, is to give him the lye: A sure mark, that it is judged an infamous quality, which sinks a man to a certain degree of meanness, and ranks him with the scum of mankind: Nay, even those, who are most addicted to it, both hate it in others, and hide it as industriously as they can from being remarked in themselves, as appears in the trouble and concern they betray when taxed with it, and the confusion they suffer when convicted of it.

Hence it appears, that *lying* is not only universally detested, but that the opinion men have

of its deformity proceeds from an inbred principle of nature, and is so deeply rooted, that nothing can efface it. And what wonder is it then, that *lying lips* (as *Solomon* has told us) should be *an abomination to God*? For if men, corrupted as they are with sin, and blinded with passion, are, by a certain irresistible impression of nature, so enamoured of the admirable beauty of truth, that they cannot but regard a *lying tongue* as a thing worthy of hatred and aversion; how much more odious and hateful must then this vice be to the pure eyes of God, who fully comprehending the infinite excellency of his own divine perfections, whereof *truth* is one, has also a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the deformity of falsehood, lying, and dissimulation; which are the vices opposite to this charming virtue? He must certainly hate the one, as much as he loves the other.

However, there are several degrees in the sin of *lying*: some of which are of a much fouler complexion than others. As for instance; to be casually surpris'd into a trivial or officious lye, is by all judg'd but a venial sin: But to make a practice even of such lyes, or to stand out stiffly in a deliberate and studied lye, (tho' no farther mischief attends it) cannot but be very displeasing to God, because it betrays a strong affection to it; and a wilful affection to any sin whatever, is a very bad disposition.

Yet, deliberate lyes too have their degrees; which are mostly taken from the different reciprocal relations of the parties concerned: Thus any insincerity or falsehood, is a greater offence in persons professing a mutual confidence in each other, than in others who are wholly free from such engagements. The same may be said
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of the relation of a child to a parent, or of a subject to a person vested with public authority; both which give an aggravation to the sin of *lying*: For though truth and fair dealing be a debt we owe to all mankind, yet some have, doubtless, more title to it than others: So that though studied and premeditated lying be always a very ill thing, 'tis never more detestable, than when nothing but candour and sincerity is, upon some special title, justly expected on the one hand, and expressly professed on the other.

Now then, to return to the matter before us, I leave every one to judge, from the considerations proposed, what sort of sin it must be, to lye to a confessor: For if all sorts of lying, but especially premeditated and studied lying, be very hateful to God, as I have fully shewed; if to dissemble and play the hypocrite with a parent or superior, or any other person, to whom we owe and profess nothing but sincerity and candour, be yet a fouler sort of lying, than when it is only practised towards an indifferent person, how hateful a thing it must be to come with a premeditated and deliberate lye to a minister of *Christ*? Who, besides his being a spiritual father, and one to whom we make profession of the greatest confidence, in seeming to trust him with the very secrets of our hearts, is, over and above, by virtue of his function, the representative of *Jesus Christ*; how detestable, I say, is it to juggle and dissemble with a person of this character, since lying to such a one is not lying to a man, but to God himself, as I have already told you.

And can a Christian think of such a sin without horror? Is it not a crime that justly deserves to be detested, with the greatest hatred and aversion?

sion? If *Christ* should manifest himself visibly to us, durst we have the boldness to dissemble with him; or attempt to pass a lye upon him? And is it not the same affront, whether he be present to us in his own person, or in the person of his minister? It is so without dispute; since he has expressly declared, that *he who despises his ministers, despises him; and he who despises him, despises his Father who sent him.* For, if to despise God's ministers, be to despise God himself; to lie to God's minister, is to lie to God himself: As it is yet farther declared by *St. Peter* upon a certain occasion; wherein God thought fit to manifest his hatred to this sin, by so severe and exemplary a judgment, as struck the whole Church with terror and amazement.

I presume, ye all guess, I mean the tragical end of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*; who having sold an estate, pretended, as other Christians had done, to bring the whole price of it to *St. Peter*: Whereas, in effect, they had kept back some part of it for their own private use. But *St. Peter*, knowing by divine revelation, the cheat they came to put upon him, was deeply wounded at heart; and being moved with a just indignation, spoke thus to *Ananias*: *Why has satan tempted thy heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? For thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.* Whereupon the unfortunate wretch, as one thunder-struck, fell down dead at *St. Peter's* feet; and a few minutes after his wife, who had been an accomplice with him in his crime, received the same reward of her hypocrisy.

This is the account given us by *St. Luke* of the exemplary judgment that befel this unhappy couple: And 'tis to be particularly observed, that *St. Peter* stiles their sin, *a lying to the Holy Ghost,*

Ghost, For though he knew the cheat was immediately intended and practised upon himself; yet inasmuch as he was *Christ's minister*, he considered the injury as done to God himself: and so the punishment was proportioned accordingly. However, we may farther observe, that in the case of these two persons, so severely punished, there was neither *sacrilege* nor *injustice*; but the whole charge against them was, *lying* and *hypocrisy*: Whereas, in the case of a false-hearted penitent, besides foul dealing, dissimulation, hypocrisy, and *lying to the Holy Ghost*, there is over and above, as I have already observed, a sacrament prophaned, God's blessings abused, his mercies trampled upon, and the most effectual means of amendment turned into an occasion of greater sins: So that, all circumstances duly weighed, it plainly appears, that the crime of a counterfeit penitent, is far more grievous in itself, and, by consequence, more detestable in the sight of God, than the sin he thought fit to express his hatred to, by such a terrifying and exemplary judgment.

But, does he then let this sin go unrevenge? No surely; for though the criminal suffers no present punishment in body, his soul falls under the malediction of God, in the very instant he commits the fact. So that whilst his deluded confessor, acting to the best of his knowledge, is busy in pronouncing his absolution, Almighty God, who cannot be imposed upon, looks down upon him with indignation, and instead of *cancelling the hand-writing that was against him*, ratifies it in the court of Heaven; and from his invincible tribunal, dooms his soul to an increase of torments answerable to the increase of his guilt.

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It is true, the time of life, being a time of mercy, the sentence pronounced against him may be reversed, provided he renders himself worthy of it: And in regard hereof, he is ever bound to acknowledge God's infinite goodness, in allowing him that time of forbearance, which he refused to those who were guilty of a less grievous sin: Nay, this consideration alone furnishes motive enough to raise in his soul the greatest detestation of the sin he has committed: And since it is without dispute that God expects he should make this use of the forbearance he favours him with; if he neglects to do it, he only lives on to his greater condemnation; and it had been happier for him, had the same judgment, which followed *Ananias* and *Sapphira* so close at the heels, also overtaken him at the very instant, he not only imitated but out-did their crime.

I shall close my discourse, with an admonition to all such as are charged with the government of children, to use their utmost watchfulness and care, to bring them up with the greatest abhorrence possible of the vice of *lying*. The particular reason of this caution, is because (besides that *lying* is a very bad quality in itself, and the mother of many other ill ones, that either spawn from it, or take shelter under it) there is one very great mischief attending it, which many perhaps have never thought of, *viz.* That a habit of *lying* out of the confessional, is a fair step towards *lying* in confession. For 'tis with this, as with all other vices, its progress is gradual, and gains upon us almost imperceptibly.

Children begin at first with little excuses, very near a-kin to lyes, to cover their ordinary faults, and prevent their being chid or corrected by

by their parents By doing this often, and finding the benefit of it, they proceed insensibly to down-right *lying*, whenever it serves their turn. As this grows customary and familiar, the horror of it wears off; nature takes a bent that way; they grow hardened to it by degrees; and thus, a false and insincere temper, being contracted by a long custom of *lying* to men, dispose them insensibly to venture upon *lying* to God himself. For this reason, all those that are employed by children, should make it their business to inspire them, from their very infancy, with the love for truth, and hatred to lying: And in order to it, whenever this vice happens to be mentioned before them, it ought always to be spoken of with the utmost detestation, and represented in such colours, as may give them a sensible horror of it.

But care should be also taken, that children should always fare the worse for telling a lye; and the better for owning the truth. For if they find by experience, that they are ever in danger of being losers by lying, and sure of being gainers by speaking the truth, this will insensibly nourish in them an hatred of the one, and a love and esteem of the other: The effect whereof will be, that being brought up from their infancy with an aversion to all untruth, sincerity will become habitual, and almost natural to them: And since the best security against sin is to keep at the greatest distance from it, 'tis evident that those, who have an abhorrence even of any sort of lying, will not easily become guilty of the foulest part of it; and the saying of *Christ* will be verified in this, as well as other instances, *viz. He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.* Luke xvi. 10.

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THE FIFTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE FOLLY OF CONCEALING ANY SIN IN CONFESSION.

Be not ashamed to speak truth for thy soul: For there is a confusion, that causeth death; and there is a confusion, that bringeth glory and grace.
Eccl. iv. 24, 25.

THE confusion *that causeth death*, is that which hinders a sinner from laying open the true state of his conscience; without which, his soul can never be restored to the life of grace. But the confusion, which has *glory* in this life, and eternal *glory* in the next, for its reward, is that which a penitent submits to in becoming his own accuser. Whence it appears, that the concealment of any sin in confession, is not only the addition of a most grievous sin, as has been proved in the former discourse; but is over and above, the very highest strain of folly and madness, as shall be shewn at large in this entertainment.

If a sinner, by imposing upon his confessor, could at the same time deceive Almighty God; if by concealing his sins from the knowledge of a man, he could also hide them from the all-seeing eyes of *Jesus Christ*; finally, if his avoiding a momentary confusion in this life, were a means to shelter him against eternal confusion hereafter, then indeed he would not altogether want encouragement to play the hypocrite, and deal unfairly with God's minister: And though, in so doing, he might be taxed with irreligion
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and sacrilege, he could not however be accused of weakness and folly.

But alas! the case is quite otherwise: The ulcers of his soul, though ever so industriously concealed from the eyes of men, lie always open to the eyes of God: That very sin, which he seeks to hide from his confessor, is already registered in the great book of accounts; and nothing but an humble confession of it can hinder it from appearing against him to his everlasting confusion, both at the hour of death, and the great day of assizes: And is it not then an unaccountable folly to refuse a compliance with a duty, when there is no prospect of an advantage to encourage a person's transgressing against it, and his submitting to it is the only means to rescue him from everlasting evils.

Suppose a criminal condemned to die, should have his pardon offered him, for only owning his crime in private, to one deputed by the judge, would he not be thought to have lost his reason, if he should refuse to submit to such easy terms? All men would certainly pronounce him guilty of excessive madness and cruelty to himself. Since therefore Almighty God imposes no harder condition on sinners, and engages his word to deliver those that submit sincerely to it from eternal death, and the endless miseries their sins have deserved; what madness and infatuation is it to reject so great a mercy, and rather chuse to continue under the sentence of eternal damnation, than purchase their pardon at so cheap a rate.

You will say perhaps the condition required is not so easy as is pretended; since to declare one's secret sins, is a thing to which man's nature has the greatest repugnance: But, to silence these reasonings of human pride, let us suppose the

the ordinary punishment of every sin we commit, were to have it exposed as long as we live, to the view of every one we converse with, and then I ask whether, in this case, a sinner would not be very mercifully dealt with, if to deliver himself from this publick and lasting confusion, he were only obliged to confess his sins in private to a single person? And whether his refusing to accept the condition, would not draw on him the imputation of folly and madness? The case admits of no dispute, since common prudence directs every one to chuse the lesser of two evils.

This then being supposed, will clearly answer all difficulties pretended on the score of natural repugnance to the duty in question: For let there be the greatest repugnance in nature to it, if submitting be the only means a sinner has left him, to prevent evils infinitely greater, even in the same kind, than what he pretends to avoid; his refusing to comply with the condition, cannot be excused from the most extravagant weakness and folly. It remains then only to shew, that the shame and confusion which will fall upon an impenitent sinner in the life to come, will not only be infinitely greater than what he apprehends in confessing his sins, but will, in every respect, exceed any confusion possible in this world, even though all his secret sins were to be continually exposed to the view of every one that sees or knows him.

To make this clearly out, let us but compare the one with the other. And, *first*, as to their duration, it is plain that the longest confusion a person can suffer in this life, cannot last longer than life itself; death will infallibly put a period to it: But the confusion of the reprobate in the life to come will last for ever.

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But will the confusion of the reprobate in the life to come, be only more lasting? No, it will also be greater beyond all comparison, than any we can suffer in this life: *First*, because the monstrous deformity of sin, both in relation to Almighty God, and our own souls, will by many degrees be then more clearly seen by us, than 'tis ever possible it should in this world; where all our ideas of things are obscure, weak, and imperfect. And, *2dly*, because for one that can know our sins now, even though they weremanifested to all that converse with us, or hear of us, millions will know them hereafter: It being an undoubted truth, that *God will, in the life to come, bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and manifest the counsels of every man's heart.* Now since the root of shame is nothing else but the idea we have, partly of the foulness of our sins, and partly of what others think of us upon that score, 'tis evident that the clearer idea we have of their enormity, and the greater the number is of those by whom they are known, the greater also must be the shame occasioned by them, and consequently the eternal confusion of impenitent sinners in the life to come, will be so excessively heightened from both these causes, that nothing in this world can come near it.

Alas, poor wretches! They are here afraid of a little confusion before a single man; and they reflect not, that they must be exposed before a numberless multitude of men and angels; which joined with their own clear sight of the blackness of their sins, appearing then before them in their own true colours, without cover or disguise, will throw so heavy a load of shame upon them, that they will even wish to sink into the ground, and hide themselves in the darkest
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dungeons of hell, to avoid being seen either by themselves or others : But their shame will pursue them even thither, and be as everlasting as their flames *that will never be quenched*, and their worms *that will never die*: Because, as the deformity of their sins will ever be before their eyes, so will this gnawing and tormenting thought be ever present to them; that they are to be eternally hated and despised by God, and all his saints and angels.

Whence I leave you to judge, whether Almighty God deals not very mercifully with us, in putting it into our power to exchange this terrible and everlasting confusion, due to our sins, for a momentary humiliation before one single person; who, as you all know, is under the strictest obligation of an inviolable secrecy that human and divine laws can lay upon him; and whether our refusing to submit to such easy terms of reconciliation, be not a weakness and folly, more becoming a man out of his senses, than one that pretends to judgment and reason?

However, to convince you still more fully of this truth, I shall make it appear, that confessing our sins is recommendable, even for the present ease it gives; and that the confusion which usually attends it, has no real foundation, but is wholly grounded upon mistake and deluded imagination. As to the *first*, I have experience clearly on my side: For, every one that is not wholly given up to a reprobate sense, must own from his own experience, that sin upon a conscience is a thorn that never ceases to gall and fret, till it be plucked up. It is an imposthume in the body; and as it is impossible for the body to be at ease, till it be fully laid open by a sincere confession, and so cleared of
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the corruption that oppressed it. So that, let a sinner flatter himself as he pleases, experience will convince him, that nothing but plain dealing, and frankly declaring his sins, without artifice, shuffling, or disguise, will never procure him that which is the greatest blessing of human life, a true and solid peace of mind.

And as to the *other* part, *viz.* That the confusion a penitent suffers in confessing his sins is all grounded upon mistake; I need but shew, that the fear he has to lose his confessor's esteem by it, is wholly vain and imaginary: For it would be very strange if that, which is the only means to restore a sinner to God's favour and esteem, should lessen him in the opinion of God's minister. But the thing is quite otherwise: *First*, because, whatever guilt a person is charged with, an humble and sincere confession makes atonement for it; and is so far from discrediting the penitent, that nothing recommends him more effectually to the esteem, and even tenderest affection of his ghostly father: For 'tis then he regards the penitent as a true copy of the prodigal son returning to his father; 'tis then he rejoices for the recovery of the lost sheep, and invites all the saints and angels to share with him in his joy.

Secondly, Because truth and sincerity are such charming virtues, that a true penitent ever gains more that way, than he can lose by being his own accuser. And,

Thirdly, Because though sin, whilst it subsists, may deservedly bring the party concerned under disesteem or contempt; yet, in relation to a penitent, it quite changes its nature: For 'tis then considered as a thing no longer in being, or as a thing that never was at all; because a sin, once blotted out by repentance, is, in effect,
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the same, as to its guilt, as if it had never been committed. It is certainly so in the judgment of Almighty God; who, when a sinner returns seriously to him, forgets his sins past as utterly, and has the same love for him as if he never had been guilty of any: And therefore, every one ought to do that justice to his confessor, as to believe he understands his duty better than to entertain sentiments directly opposite to those of Almighty God; or to harbour in his heart an ill opinion of one whom he has reason to regard as a person honoured with the friendship of Almighty God.

It is true, a confessor cannot have an infallible assurance of the repentance of the party that presents himself before him: However, he is always bound to suppose it, as long as nothing appears to ground a contrary judgment; and every one may be assured, that one of the best marks he can have of the good disposition of a penitent, is, to find him frank and sincere in opening his conscience to him; whereas, if he has reason to suspect him guilty of double-dealing, he cannot but entertain a very uncomfortable opinion of him.

But let us, after all, suppose a person, by accusing himself, should, in some measure, forfeit the esteem of his confessor: Is this a rational motive, to play the hypocrite, and continue under the guilt of mortal sin? How many are there in the world, who stick not to deal very plainly with their physicians, though they have the greatest repugnance to it? And ought we not then to be as ready to suffer something in compliance with our duty to God, and to prevent irreparable mischiefs from falling upon us? Or are we not infinitely more cruel and barbarous to ourselves, in wilfully multiplying the mortal

mortal distempers of our souls by a criminal silence, than if we took the same course to destroy our bodies?

But here I should be glad to ask a person concerned in this crime, what it is he proposes to himself? Does he ever intend to confess the sin he has concealed, or not? If not, then he renounces all hopes of salvation, and resolves directly to damn himself: And what a desperate resolution is this in one, who believes there are eternal flames prepared for those who die in mortal sin? But, if he resolves to confess it some time or other, why not sooner as well as later? Nay, why not at first, as well as afterwards? For the longer he runs on in this course, the harder it will be to get out of it: Because whenever he sets about it, besides his being then bound to declare the sin till then concealed, and the number of sacrileges since added to it over and above, all confessions, since his first abuse of the sacrament, being void and null, must be looked back into, and repeated.

And is not the ripping up of so many old sores, and the unraveling a conscience perplexed with a multiplicity of sins, a task that will put him to a much greater shame and confusion, than what he pretends to decline at first? Is it not much easier to confess a single sin, whatever it be, than when it comes attended with a long train of other sins, besides the grievous aggravation of sacrilege? This therefore being the unavoidable consequence of sacrilegious confessions, in relation to one that is not resolutely bent upon damning himself; 'tis evident, that all delays and put-offs in this matter, cannot but encrease the very difficulty upon which they are pretended, and serve to no other purpose, than
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to cut out work for a sadder repentance, and a more mortifying shame.

But some perhaps depend upon an easier expedient, *viz.* of making one confession for all upon their death-bed: For then, say they, they care not what their confessors think of them. But suppose this fine project should miscarry; suppose they should die suddenly, or be out of their senses in their last sickness, what becomes of them then? Are they not lost without remedy? However, allowing them the fairest chance such an unchristian design will admit of, it is but too much to be feared, that they who confess not till they just feel themselves dropping into destruction, are so disposed at heart, that they would not even confess then, had they any prospect of a longer life; and they must give me leave to tell them, that a confession made with this disposition, is but a very unsafe bottom to hazard their salvation upon. Besides what is done under a great fright and consternation, proceeding mostly from a mere servile fear; the confession and repentance a sinner is scared into, by seeing hell-fire just before him, looks so like that of a man upon the rack, who is willing to say or do any thing for a little ease, that there is all the reason in the world to suspect there is more of show than reality in it.

I say not this to encourage despondency in any one, that should prove so unhappy as to have put things upon the last hazard; because, whatever his case may be, endeavouring to repent, and make his peace with God, is certainly the best thing he can do at any time whatever; and the last moments of his life cannot be better employed, than in a work so necessary, as that of confessing and repenting: However, I think
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myself bound to deter all men from hazarding their salvation upon so great an uncertainty, and letting things come to a pass, that a death-bed repentance is all they have to depend upon.

In a word, Almighty God is not to be mocked; and those who designedly put off the confessing their sins till they come to die, will, I fear, find, by woeful experience, that they have only played the devil's game for him, and been industrious in laying snares for their own souls. Let us beseech Almighty God to preserve all Christians from this fatal blindness, and infuse into their souls so large a portion of the spirit of truth, that they may ever abominate all insincerity or double dealing; but especially when the honour of his holy sacraments is concerned, and their own eternal interest lies at stake.

THE FIFTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF UNWORTHY COMMUNIONS.

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself. 1 Cor. xi. 29.

SACRILEGIOUS confessions (of which enough has been said) usually lead the way to unworthy communions; the fatal consequences whereof shall be the subject of this entertainment.

Before I enter upon this subject, I shall explain briefly the nature of this sin; which St. Paul expresses in the strongest terms possible, when he tells us, that *Whoever shall eat this bread, or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily,*

VOL. II.

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shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
 1 Cor. xi. 27. The reason whereof is thus given by St. Chrysostome: *Because* (says he) *whoever approaches to this divine table unworthily, is like those who pierced the body of our Lord, not to drink, but to spill his blood:* That is to say, not to apply to themselves the spiritual fruit and benefit of it, but to prophane it, and *trample it under foot*, according to St. Paul's expression in another place.

Whence it follows, that the sin of an unworthy communicant is *sacrilege* in the highest degree: Because, the specifick nature of this sin, consisting in an abuse or prophanation of any thing that is holy; the consequence is, that it is more or less enormous, in proportion to the holiness of the thing that is abused. A Church is, for example holy; and the altar and vessels belonging to it, are likewise holy; because they are consecrated to holy uses, and a contemptuous abuse of any of these things is sacrilege in a certain degree; though 'tis manifest they have no intrinsic holiness inherent in them, but are only holy from the relation they have to the infinite holiness of God, to whose service they are appropriated. But the blessed *Eucharist* is intrinsically, nay, infinitely holy, because it contains the very source and fountain of holiness, and it is literally true, that *in it dwells the God-head corporeal*. So that it eminently excels the other sacraments in dignity; and is not merely an outward sign of grace, or channel through which it is conveyed to the soul, but the source itself, from which all grace and blessings flow.

This makes it plain, what I said just now, *viz.* That the sin of an unworthy communicant is *sacrilege*, *in the highest degree*: Because, as the thing prophaned by him is superlatively holy,
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so is the prophanation of it most superlatively sacrilegious and wicked ; and whereas in other cases of sacrilege, the prophanation regards at most but things that have a near relation to God, in this it is levelled against God himself, and strikes directly at him. And is not this a most enormous and detestable sin ! Ought we not to have the greatest horror of it !

Now then let us see the hatred God bears to *sacrilege* of any kind whatever ; and with what severity he has often punished it even in this life ; that we may gather from thence what treatment a sacrilegious communicant may justly expect at his hands : For, in the first place, we find the bare prophanation of the material temple of *Jerusalem*, represented by God himself as a crime he resolved to punish in the most exemplary manner. His words, *Ezekiel the 5th*, are as follow : *Wherefore as I live, says the Lord God, because thou hast defiled my holy place with all thy abominations, therefore will I also destroy thee. Neither will my eye spare thee ; neither will I have compassion on thee.* The rest of the chapter contains a frightful catalogue of the several punishments Almighty God designed to inflict on the *Jews* ; and all for the crime there specified, *viz.* Their having defiled his holy temple ; which was so hateful to him, that he resolved to revenge it with the utmost desolations of plague, war, and famine.

But the many sudden and exemplary judgments that have fallen upon persons in the very act of sacrilege, are the clearest testimony of God's severity in punishing this sin. *Nadab* and *Abihu* having, contrary to God's law, kindled their censers with prophane or common fire, a flame issued from the Lord, as the scripture says, and devoured them in an instant.

Oza was struck dead for only presuming to touch the *ark*, when it was in danger of falling. All the inhabitants of *Azotus* were punished with cruel plagues, for having placed the said ark, which they had taken from the *Israelites*, in the temple of *Dagon*, and above fifty thousand *Bethsamites* were destroyed, for not paying a due respect to it, as it passed through their country. *Balthazar*, whilst he was prophaneing the holy vessels, which his grandfather had transported out of the temple of *Jerusalem* to *Babylon*, was terrified with the apparition of a hand-writing, the sentence of his condemnation, which was accordingly executed upon him that very night : And *Heliodorus*, attempting to execute the sacrilegious orders of his prince, was so severely chastised upon the very spot, by two angels appearing in defence of the holy place, that had not *Onias* interceded for him, it had cost him his life.

I omit innumerable other instances of God's wrath, manifested in his severe judgments on those that have the boldness either to violate holy places, or treat with disrespect things contrary to his service : But from the few I have produced, I leave every Christian to judge, whether the unworthy communicant has not reason to apprehend the severest effects of God's wrath. The matter will appear beyond all question, if we but consider these three truths, *1st*, that God never punishes any sin beyond what it deserves; *2^{dly}*, that his justice observes a proportion between the punishment and guilt of the offender; and *3^{dly}*, that the sacrilege of an unworthy communicant is beyond all measure more grievous than that of any of the forementioned offenders : For what comparison can there be between his crime and theirs ? Are not the institutions

tutions of the Christian religion and its sacraments, especially the sacrament of the *Body and Blood of Christ*, more holy than the rites and ceremonies of the *Mosaic law*? Or is not *Christ* himself infinitely more holy than the *Jewish* temple, or the *ark* or *vessels* belonging to it? The matter will admit of no dispute: Nor can we therefore doubt but that the punishment of an unworthy communicant, who abuses God in his own person, will be proportionably more grievous, as he is more criminal than they who only affronted him in the prophanation of things that had a relation to him.

If then the very lowest degree of sacrilege was punished so severely by Almighty God, with what rigour will his justice one day revenge the wicked abuse of the *Holy of holies*? If his indignation was so kindled against the prophaners of his temple, with what fury will it discharge itself upon those, who offer the boldest indignities to the majesty of God himself? Finally, if idolaters themselves were chastised with such remarkable severity, only for placing the *ark of the covenant* in the temple of *Dagon*; can Christians, who place the Son of God in temples defiled with sin, and inhabited by the devil, presume their crime will not draw upon them punishments answerable to the grievousness of it?

I own, I cannot but wonder that those who go to commit it, with full knowledge and deliberation, should not fear to fall into the hands of the *living God*, and be made examples of his justice upon the very spot; as some others, who have had the boldness to attempt it, have been before them, if we may believe *St. Cyprian* and *St. Chrysostome*; who relate, that several in their times became distracted, upon their having communicated

communicated unworthily : St. *Cyprian* also relates, that some others were delivered over to be possessed and tormented by the devil for the same crime ; and that a certain woman, having in private eaten of meats that had been offered to idols, and coming not long after to communicate with other Christians, had no sooner received the blessed sacrament, but found herself inwardly tormented, as if she had taken some strong poison, and died immediately upon it, to the great terror of the whole assembly. The same father relates some other very terrifying examples of this nature, which I omit for brevity sake ; these few sufficing to convince us, how dangerous it is to be concerned in a crime, which may draw the like judgment on us.

However, I must own these visible judgments are but rare, comparatively to the number of those that deserve them : For 'tis with this crime as with all others, they are always equally abominable in the sight of God : But he contents himself with having manifested his hatred of them, by some visible examples of his justice upon particular offenders of each kind : The rest he remits for their deserved reward, to the world to come. Thus he has sufficiently testified his hatred to *murder*, *adultery*, *perjury*, &c. by now and then afflicting exemplary chastisements upon murderers, adulterers, and those that forswear themselves, though innumerable others, as guilty as they in the same kind, have escaped without any such judgments falling upon them.

And thus it is in reference to the crime we now speak of. Almighty God has abundantly taken care to let us know, how provoking a sin it is to abuse his holy sacraments, by the exemplary rigour wherewith he has sometimes revenged

venged it: Many, perhaps more deeply concerned, seem to escape punished; and this emboldens them to persist in their crime: But let them not presume too long: The delay of payment only increases the debt, which will be, sooner or later, demanded to the last farthing. *Let not any one* (says St. Cyprian, speaking of unworthy communicants) *imagine he has escaped punishment, because it is as yet somewhat delayed; since God's delaying to chastise his sins, ought rather to increase his fear.* For when Almighty God seems to take no notice even of those crying sins, and holds his hand even when he is most provoked to strike, it is a sign the offender is reserved for an after blow, and marked out for an everlasting victim of the severest justice.

However, if we judge of things by faith, we shall find an unworthy communicant goes not unpunished, even in this life; though no visible judgment falls upon him: For though God sends him no visible plagues, he delivers up his soul to invisible ones, more fatal to him, than if all the plagues of *Egypt* fell upon him: The first of these is the *death* of his soul, or rather an increase of death, if I may call it so: For though the death of the body admits of no degrees, but is the same whether it be occasioned by one or a thousand mortal wounds; it is not so with the death of the soul; every mortal sin is an increase of it, in as much as it removes the soul at a greater distance from God, makes her return to him more difficult, puts a fresh obstacle to her recovering the life of grace, and gives the devil a stronger hold of her.

Now if *these* be the effects of any additional guilt, the *abuse* of the sacraments must needs be attended with them in a far greater degree; because the very nature and effect of this sin, is
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to obstruct the very source and fountain of grace, by rendering that, which should nourish and strengthen the life of the soul, not only useless, but hurtful and poisonous to her, and converting the very best remedy against sin, into an occasion of its greatest sense: And can any thing either remove the soul farther from God, or put her more fully into the devil's power? Nothing certainly can so effectually establish his dominions, or fix him more firmly in the heart.

Hence follow two other fatal effects of unworthy communions, *viz. blindness and hardness of heart*, which seem to be prophetically denounced in these words of the *Psalmist*: *Let their table become a snare before them, and let that, which should have been their welfare, become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened that they see not. Let them always bend under the weight of their sins. Pour forth thy indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.* Nor is this to be wondered at, since the farther the soul is removed from the light of grace, and divine illustrations, and the more she is in the power of the prince of darkness, the more she must needs be blinded with her own sinful lusts; which meeting with no opposition from the grace of the sacraments to restrain them, lead her captive at pleasure, and engage her, by insensible degrees, in any sin corrupt nature shall suggest to her.

Whence follows, of course, the *hardness of heart*, which I have mentioned for the *third* effect of sacrilegious communions: However, there needs not many steps or degrees to bring men to this unhappy disposition, when their consciences are once sufficiently emboldened to attempt so black a crime with full knowledge. It is true, the fear of human laws, or shame to
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be thought scandalous may be a curb upon them ; but surely no error of conscience can restrain them after this : For what crime can be frightful enough to startle a conscience, that has had the boldness to outrage God in his own person ? Will a child that dares affront his father to his face, have the least regard to his commands upon a principle of duty ? Will a subject that is bold enough to abuse his sovereign in his presence, stick to trample upon his laws ? And what then will not a Christian be capable of committing, when he is once become so destitute of conscience, as to offer the greatest indignity even to the king of Heaven and earth ? So that, what with the boldness of the crime on the one hand, and the withdrawals of grace, and the blindness it causes on the other, there is no sin contributes more effectually to harden men against all terror of conscience, and make them venture at any thing, than that of wilful unworthy communions.

But what does all this usually tend to. It is thus the unworthy communicant, like a victim fitted for slaughter, is insensibly prepared for the execution of the dreadful sentence that passed upon him, when he committed the fact : For, at the instant a communicant receives the sacrament unworthily, *Jesus Christ*, erecting his invisible tribunal in the midst of his heart, pronounces sentence of eternal damnation upon him, or rather changes the sentence formerly incurred into a much severer one ; and 'tis this *St. Paul* calls *eating and drinking judgment to himself*. Because as often as he eats or drinks unworthily, he falls under a fresh sentence of condemnation ; which, in proportion to the new crime added, is ever more and more severe than the former.

It is true, this sentence is not irrevocably fixed; God is ready to reverse it upon the sincerest repentance of the offender. However, it is most certain, that some sinners are harder to be reclaimed and wrested out of the devil's power than others; and I fear unworthy communicants are of this unhappy number. They have abused God in his greatest blessings, and made void the best remedies provided by him for their cure; God's sanctifying grace is withdrawn from them; their enemy is doubly fortified against them; and the Blood of *Christ*, the most sovereign balm for a wounded conscience, by their abuse of it, lies heavy upon their souls, and seems rather to cry for vengeance than plead for mercy. All these circumstances render the case of an unworthy communicant very deplorable, and look upon him with an ominous aspect, as seeming to forbode, that though the time of forbearance allowed him, be absolutely improveable to the salvation of his soul, if he but takes the right course; it will probably only be abused by him to his greater condemnation.

In effect, all this came to pass in the case of the unfortunate *Judas*; who ought to be the terror, as he was the first example of an unworthy communicant; for he had no sooner eaten the consecrated morsel given him by *Christ*, but the devil entered into him, as St. *John* relates; and it is probable that in that very instant, the devil confirmed him in his wicked design of betraying his master: For, from that instant forwards, he was delivered up to a reprobate sense; his soul was wholly blinded with avarice, which was his predominant passion; and his heart was so hardened, that neither the remembrance of past favours, nor the wonders he had

had been eye-witness of, nor the touching things our Saviour then said to him, could work any effect upon him; but hurried on by the evil spirit that possessed him, he went immediately forth to execute his wicked design, and every step he made, after that, contributed to hasten him towards the terrible judgment that was waiting for him, and fell upon him the very day after he had committed the crime; when, as you all know, he filled up the measure of his sins by self-murder, and died in despair.

Here you see the natural effects of an unworthy communion exactly represented in the reprobation, blindness, obduracy, and final despair of him, who gave the first example of it: I say the natural effects: For though God's infinite mercy and the power of his grace, may and does many times prevent them; yet the nature of the crime itself is such, as leads men, by insensible degrees, to all the fatal dispositions I have remarked, which also naturally draw after them final impenitence and despair; especially if a person be so unhappy, as to be overtaken in his last sickness, whilst he is yet in the practice of this crime. For I cannot imagine any thing can be a heavier load upon a conscience in that case, or a more dead weight to sink him into despair, than when he reflects upon his death-bed, that he is going to appear before the tribunal of *Jesus Christ*, whose Blood he has so often been guilty of; and that the only thing he has now to depend upon, is the grace of those very sacraments he has till then abused. These reflections, I say, will, in the case supposed, be a most violent temptation to despair; and the devil, who now labours to lull men's consciences asleep, whilst they are in perfect health, will not only be the first suggester of despairing

spairing thoughts in their last sickness, but make it his business to heighten them to the utmost of his power.

However, if this should happen to be the case of any person, he is bound to bear up with all his strength against any suggestions of that nature; to regard them as the last efforts of the devil's malice against him, and raise in his soul the greatest horror and detestation of them: Because his salvation depends then absolutely, upon his resisting them with all his force. But the securest way is not to let things go so far, but to prevent the danger of so violent a temptation, by a sincere repentance in time of health, and since all sinners have it in their power to take this course, it is undoubtedly the interest as well as duty of every unfortunate Christian, who finds his conscience charged with the guilt of sacrilegious communions, not to let slip the opportunity, which the divine bounty now favours him with, of applying to his soul, the remedies necessary for his cure: And therefore, the farther he has departed from God, the more haste he must make to return to him, with the sincere repentance of a contrite and humble heart: And whereas his principal guilt consists in having abused his holy sacraments, his principal care must also be to repair those abuses, as far as in him lies: *First*, by making good the defects of all former confessions; at least from that time forwards, in which he first became guilty of that sin; *secondly*, by submitting to any terms of reconciliation, his confessor shall propose to him; and, *thirdly*, by approaching ever after to the holy table with such a sincere humility, respect, and devotion, as may be some atonement for his abuses committed against it. If he performs these conditions, he may confidently

confidently rely upon the infinite goodness of his Redeemer; and animate himself with an assured hope, that that very Blood, which would have called for vengeance, had he continued in the abuse of it, will now cry so powerfully to Heaven for mercy, as to render him eternally partaker of the fruits of it.

THE FIFTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

CHRIST'S LOVE IN INSTITUTING THE BLESSED
SACRAMENT.

A certain man made a great supper. Luke xiv.
16.

UNDER the figure of the supper here mentioned, is signified, *first*, that everlasting banquet in Heaven, where the blessed souls are *in-ebriated with the plenty of the house of God*: And, *2dly*, the sacrament of the holy Eucharist, which contains the real *Body and Blood of Jesus Christ*; and is a *supper truly great*: A supper indeed fitter for angels than men; and suited in all things to the infinite greatness and liberality of him that is the master of it: For it is not a banquet of inestimable value? Could either God's infinite wisdom have contrived, or his power produced, or his boundless liberality bestowed, any thing greater upon us than his own self?

We may therefore with just reason call it a *great supper*. And yet how great soever this supper is, the very meanest of us have the honour to be invited to it; nay, we are not only invited, but even pressed and importuned to come; and our Saviour is highly displeased, if we refuse to accept of his bounty: What infinite goodness is this! What inestimable love! To
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make ungrateful sinners, the objects of the greatest bounty! To invite poor worms of the earth to be partakers of the bread of angels! To raise them from the dust, and place them at the table of the King of Heaven and earth!

But though this heavenly banquet, considered only in its own intrinsic worth, be a gift of infinite value, and an undoubted pledge of the infinite love of the giver, yet there are some circumstances relating to the institution of it, which, if considered apart, will serve to heighten our idea of *Christ's* love, in bestowing this great gift upon us. These then shall be the subject of this entertainment.

It is certain, that the affection of the party that bestows a favour, is a considerable addition to the intrinsic value of it; as, on the contrary, the very greatest gifts lose much of their value, when they are presented with a certain coldness or indifference; because whatever the value of the gift be in itself, the heart and inclination of the giver is always more regarded than the gift itself. Now, nothing is a surer mark of the most affectionate disposition in the heart, than when a person has a certain pressing desire, and earnest longing to bestow his favours. For, as the first effect of true love, is a desire to do good to the person we love, so a great desire to do good is an effect and mark of a great love, and the greater this desire is, the greater is the love from which it proceeds.

This leads me to the *first* circumstance, which in some measure discovers to us the greatness of our Saviour's love in instituting the sacrament of the holy Eucharist, *viz.* The earnest longing and desire he had to bestow this blessing on us. We have his own words to assure us of it: For being at his last supper with his apostles, and
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upon the point of instituting this holy banquet, he unboomed himself to them in these affectionate words: *With longing have I desired to eat this passover with you.* He had already twice before that time eaten the *passover*; that is the supper of the Paschal-lamb with his apostles: But that was only an empty figure of the banquet he was now preparing for them: And therefore he said not that he had with longing desired to eat *the* passover, but to eat *this* passover, with them before he suffered, meaning the last supper, wherein he designed to present them with the substance instead of the shadow, and feast their souls with the sacred flesh of the immaculate Lamb, which takes away the sins of the world. This has been the subject of his longing; this the supper he so earnestly desired to eat with them before he parted from them.

But though our Saviour had been silent, the action speaks clearly for itself: For nothing is a more convincing proof of an earnest desire of any thing, than when it is so prevalent upon us, as to make us break through all obstacles to liberality and bounty, none can be imagined greater than that of notorious ingratitude; because nothing is either more provoking on the one hand, or renders a person more unworthy, even of the smallest favours on the other, than an ungrateful temper: All mankind is so possessed with this principle, that even the most generous spirits are scarce able to resist this provocation; and nothing but a more than ordinary inclination to do good, can possibly prevail upon a person to bestow his favours, where he expects no other return than injuries and affronts.

Now then let us consider, what returns our Saviour expected the world would make him,
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for the great blessing he was going to bestow upon it; and whether he had not all the provocation imaginable to hinder him from accomplishing his loving design: For at the very time he instituted this heavenly banquet, he knew his own chosen people, who were already indebted to him for so many signal blessings, were assembled in council, in order to contrive his death: He knew that *Judas*, who was to be one of the first partakers of it, had already entertained thoughts to betray him, and would give the devil possession of his own soul as soon as the sacred body and blood should enter into his stomach. He knew, that thousands of Christians would become guilty of the same horrid sacrilege, by receiving this bread of angels with hearts already possessed by the devil; and that the greatest part of mankind would utterly disown the favour, by their disbelief of it: Finally, he foresaw, that, by bestowing it, he should expose his own sacred person to innumerable outrages and affronts; and that of all his favours, designed for our eternal salvation, none would be rendered more prejudicial to souls, by their voluntary abuse of it, than this so signal a pledge of his love: Yet all this enormous ingratitude of the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, *Heretics* and *Catholics*, clearly foreseen and known, could not put a stop to his intended bounty, nor hinder him from prosecuting his loving design: So great was his desire to communicate himself to us, so great an inclination had he to bestow this heavenly blessing upon us.

Thus then we see the greatness of our Saviour's love, in instituting this heavenly banquet, from the earnest desire and longing he had to render us partakers of so great a blessing: But the motives of this earnest desire afford a *second* circumstance,

circumstance, discovering yet more fully the greatness of his love. The *first* of these motives is expressed by him in these words; *Do this in remembrance of me*: By which we are given to understand, that the end he proposed to himself, in instituting this heavenly banquet, was, that it might be to us as a lasting token to remember him by: And is not this a most convincing proof of a very extraordinary love? Does it not at once discover both the tenderness of a father, and affection of a friend? For the greatest token a dying parent can give of his tenderness for his children, is to bestow his best blessings upon them, and leave them heirs of all he is worth; and the surest mark a dying friend can give of his affection to his surviving friends, is to express a kind concern to be always remembered by them: So that our Saviour, in this one act, performed the part both of a friend and parent; for we may truly say, that in bequeathing to us his own precious Body and Blood, he made us heirs of a treasure of infinite value; and in this he shewed himself a most tender parent, and in leaving us this heavenly banquet, in order to be remembered by us, and survive for ever in our hearts, he shewed himself the best of friends.

It is strange, indeed, the King of Heaven and earth should have any concern at all to be remembered by us, poor worms of the earth; but it is much more astonishing he should be concerned for it to that degree, as to leave us the richest treasure Heaven could bestow, or earth receive, as a token to remember him by: For had he any prospect of advantage by our being mindful of him? Or did he fear to be a loser by being forgot by us? No, certainly:
But

But he knew we should be great gainers by daily remembering him, and great losers by being unmindful of him; and that was a sufficient motive to him to desire to be always remembered by us: For the only reason why he desired it was, because he loved us, and desired to be reciprocally loved by us; as knowing it to be so much our true interest to love him, that as it was impossible we should be happy if we loved him not, so we could not but be truly happy if we loved him; and since a frequent remembrance of him would be a powerful means to create and nourish in our hearts a true love of him, he left us this precious Body and Blood, in the sacrament of the holy Eucharist, as a subsisting memorial of him, and an everlasting token to remember him by.

The *second* motive why our Saviour would institute this heavenly banquet, was, that we might for ever abide in him, and he in us; as is expressly declared in these words; *Whoever eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him*: Which words express the most perfect and mutual union we are capable of in this mortal life, and helps likewise to give us still a fuller idea of the greatness of our Saviour's love in this holy institution: For as all love, whether of God or man, tends to a kind of union to the object of that love, so the more vehement the love is, the closer is the union it tends to: But whereas the perfectest love between man and man, can never go beyond a moral union of hearts, our loving Saviour has, by means of the holy Eucharist, found out an expedient to unite himself really and truly to all that receive it: He lodges himself in our very breasts; he incorporates himself, as I may say,

say,

say, and becomes, as it were, one flesh with us : And therefore, this sacrament is, by some of the fathers, called a kind of *extension of the Incarnation* ; that is, the union of God and man ; enlarged and extended to all that are made partakers of it : For, by means of it, he communicates himself not only to one single man ; but is rendered communicable to all the individuals of mankind : So that whoever partakes of this holy banquet, receives into himself really and substantially, the same divine person that once assumed our nature in the immaculate womb of the *Blessed Virgin Mary*.

It may also be called an *extension of the Incarnation* ; because, as our Saviour was, by his incarnation, once really born of the *Virgin Mary* ; so is he, by the holy Eucharist, spiritually re-born in the souls of all that receive him worthily : And therefore, as he never will be separated from the nature he once assumed, so the proper effect of the holy Eucharist, is a permanent union with us, by sanctifying grace and charity : as is clearly insinuated by these words ; *Whoever eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him* : For our Saviour says not, *Whoever eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, shall exchange a passing visit with me, and so part from me again ; but abideth in me, and I in him* : Which imports a plain condemnation of those circular vicissitudes of rising and falling of grace and sin, life and death, and, in a word, of communicating one day with *Christ*, and a few days after with the devil, but too much practised by habitual sinners : For, surely, it never was our Saviour's intention to enter into us, as a passenger into a lodging, for a day or two, and so leave us ; but to make
a permanent

a permanent possession of our hearts, to enter into them as an inseparable friend, as a domestick companion, to make his abode with us for ever, and become the source of a durable and lasting grace.

And therefore those, whose lives go round in a continual circle of communicating and relapsing into mortal sin, do not only frustrate our Saviour's principal intention, in the institution of this heavenly banquet, but have also great reason to fear, that though his sacred Body has often entered into their stomachs, he has perhaps but seldom entered by his holy grace into their souls. It is true, the grace of the sacrament, effectually received, may be lost by the surprise of a violent temptation: But when relapses grow into a certain regular custom, 'tis much more to be suspected, that the grace of the holy Eucharist has been but seldom received, than constantly lost; because, as our Saviour tells us, *whoever eats his body, and drinks his blood; that is, receives it worthily, abides in Christ, and Christ in him.*

Thus then we see the greatness of our Saviour's love in instituting this heavenly banquet, discovered to us, *first*, by the vehement desire he had to bestow this blessing on us; and, *secondly*, by the two motives of that desire, *viz.* that he might be always remembered by us, and most intimately united to us: Whence we ought to form these three resolutions; *first*, to imitate the goodness of our Blessed Saviour, by doing good even to those who repay us with ingratitude; *secondly*, to fix in our hearts a lasting remembrance of him, with a deep sense of gratitude for the blessing received; and, *lastly*, to live

live so, that *Christ* may abide in us, and we in him.

THE SIXTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE RETURNS WE USUALLY MAKE OUR SAVIOUR
FOR HIS LOVE.

They began all at once to excuse themselves. Luke
xiv. 18.

I HAVE represented to you, in my former discourse, the greatness of our Saviour's love, in instituting the sacrament of the holy Eucharist; I shall now make some reflections upon the returns we usually make him for it, which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

The first circumstance, whereby we have discovered the greatness of our Saviour's love, in instituting the holy Eucharist, was the earnest desire and longing he had to bestow this blessing on us; a desire so great, that no obstacle could put a stop to his intended bounty. But how do we correspond with this desire of our loving Saviour? Do we covet as earnestly to receive him, as he desires to communicate himself to us? Are we as ready to open our hearts to let him in, as he is to enter into them? Do we long and hunger after this bread of life, with such a craving appetite, that no obstacle whatsoever, no temporal concerns, no pleasures of this world can hinder us from satisfying our hunger? Alas, how far are we from this happy disposition! How far are we from making our Saviour this acceptable return! How truly, on the contrary, is the behaviour of many Christians represented in the parable, from whence I have taken my text! Where we have this account

count of the guests invited to the supper. *They beg all at once to excuse themselves.* One said *he had bought a country-house, and must go see it.* Another alledged, *he had bought five yoke of oxen, and was going to try them:* A third gave for answer, *that he had married a wife, and therefore could not come.*

By the first of these characters are marked out those who spend their time in trifling amusements, which they make in a manner their whole employment. By the second character of him that *had bought oxen, and was going to try them*, are meant your men of business, whose whole time and thought are taken up with temporal concerns. Finally, by the third character, of him who *had married a wife, and therefore could not come*, are signified persons wholly plunged in sensual pleasures: Now all these put off the invitation, and desired to be excused: And how lively a representation is this of the behaviour of many Christians, in reference to the great banquet of the Lord's supper, to which all are invited!

Some neglect to frequent the holy communion, merely out of a slothful and careless temper, and those are your tepid or luke-warm Christians. They are, for the most part, too conscientious, on the one hand, to receive the holy Eucharist without being in some measure disposed for it; and yet too slothful to prepare themselves on the other: They know they must do many things, to be worthily disposed: They must retire from company, and be serious for some time: They must call themselves to an account by a strict examination of conscience, excite themselves to a hearty repentance, confess their sins, perform their penance, and be somewhat recollected before and after Communion.

But

But their natural sloth, which they are accustomed to gratify, gives them such a repugnancy to all these duties, that though they have often so much time lying on their hands, that they scarce know how to dispose of it, yet every trifling accident that throws itself in their way, as a party of pleasure to go see something that invites their curiosity, suffices to make them put off their Communion.

Others again are so taken up with temporal concerns, and overwhelmed with business, that, alas ! they have no time to pay their attendance upon our Blessed Saviour at his supper ; and therefore these all, for the most part, put off the invitation, and desire to be excused ; and whereas the former are usually too slothful, these, on the contrary, are for the most part, too full of business to save their souls. But there is a third sort that excuse themselves, upon a pretence yet worse than the former. Those I mean who are strongly addicted to sensual pleasures : God invites them often by his holy inspirations ; but they know that to become partakers of his holy table, they must renounce their criminal engagements ; they must throw off their old habits, and enter upon a new course of life. But finding their hearts too strongly engaged to resolve upon a thorough change, they refuse the invitation and desire to be excused.

Thus we see how little the greatest part of Christians are disposed to comply with our Saviour's earnest desire of communicating himself to them. He invites, and they refuse to come. He offers them his precious Body and Blood, and they prefer each petty interest or trifling satisfaction before him.

But how did the master of the feast receive the excuses of the parties invited ? The gospel tells us,

us, that he was highly offended, and declared that *none of them all should ever taste his supper*. We cannot doubt but that a contempt, as well as abuse of God's favours, is a very grievous offence, and what we shall account for at the last day. Now, are we not guilty of a contempt of the inestimable blessing offered us in the holy Eucharist, when we neglect to receive it, either because we are unwilling to put ourselves to some trouble, or deprive ourselves of some small satisfaction, and offer some violence to our inclinations, for its sake? Is it not a convincing proof, that we prefer the enjoyment of a little ease or pleasure before it? And what is this but a barefaced contempt and under-valuing of it?

Nor can we doubt but this neglect becomes to many the first step to their everlasting ruin; and their falling under that terrible sentence of being eternally excluded from the banquet prepared in Heaven: For by depriving themselves of this spiritual food, the health of their souls is insensibly impaired; their virtues are as it were starved; their hearts poisoned with the world; their vital spirits, I mean the moistening grace of the Holy Ghost, dried up for want of this fountain of living waters; and, finally, their whole souls scorched with the burning fevers of concupiscence, hatred, revenge, pride, avarice, and other such passions; Almighty God abandoning them to their own corruption, in punishment of their contempt of this holy banquet, which thus becomes the occasion of the death of their souls in this life, and their utter ruin hereafter.

And therefore the devil, knowing how much the health and life of our souls depend upon this spiritual food, uses all means possible to draw

us

us from it, imitating therein the policy of *Holophernes*, who having laid siege to *Bethulia*, and consulting with his officers about the shortest and easiest way to reduce it, was advised to possess himself of the fountains that supplied the town with water; for being deprived of these, it would be forced to surrender without battle or bloodshed. This is the very stratagem the devil makes use of to become, in a short time, master of our souls. He does all he can to hinder us from access to the *fountains of living waters*, the Body and Blood of *Jesus Christ*: For he is sure we cannot hold out a long siege without it. A few weeks will easily consume the portion of grace, without which our souls cannot live spiritually; and this supply being intercepted, they must be starved of course, and surrender for want of this spiritual food.

But as we usually make our Saviour but very ill returns for the great desire he has to communicate himself to us; so when we have sometimes admitted him into our breasts, we have likewise, for the most part, but little regard to the principal motive of that desire; which is, *to abide for ever with us*. What cold entertainment do we usually give him: How little care do we take to digest this spiritual food, and convert it into solid nourishment! How soon do we grow weary of his company! A few distracted prayers huddled over in haste, and looking rather like a set form of ceremonious compliments, than sincere expressions of true love and affection, is all the entertainment we usually afford him. We seem to be afraid of his company, as the apostles were in the time of his passion, lest some scurrilous companion observing us to be more devout than usual, should in derision put the same question to us, as the maid put to St.

Peter ; hast thou not been with Jesus this morning ?
And truly we take care, for the most part, to disown him as much by our light and undevout comportment immediately after Communion, as if we had not all been in his company that day.

But no comparison represents our behaviour so well as that of the ungrateful *Gerasens* ; who, soon after our Saviour's arrival amongst them, joined all in an unanimous petition to him, that he would forthwith depart from them. It is true our behaviour is not so open and barefaced as theirs ; but 'tis in effect the same. We seem to be afraid lest an attentive regard to his presence should be some curb upon our inclinations, or restrain the freedom of our merry entertainments, which rather than want for any time, we immediately dismiss him, and in a manner solicit his departure from us.

And this is one principal cause, why after so many communions, we are still so weak and inconstant, so subject to relapses, and defective in the performance of our daily duties. For 'tis not to be doubted, but the effects of this sacrament would appear in a change of life, if we put no obstacle to them, either by a want of preparation, or a negligent comportment after communion : For our Saviour deals many times with us, in this case, as we deal with him. If we stay with him, and keep our thoughts at home to bear him company, he also stays with us ; and all the blessings he brings with him remain in our souls : But if we have little or no regard to his divine presence ; if we resume forthwith our customary distractions, and so fly from him, and in a manner solicit his departure, truly he often takes us at our word, and withdraws himself from us, with the graces and blessings

blessings he had brought to enrich our souls : For he dealt just so with the forementioned *Gerazens*, who desiring him to quit their country, he took them at their word, *and departed from them.*

Thus it appears but too plainly, what sort of returns we usually make our Saviour for his infinite love, in instituting this heavenly banquet. He desires most earnestly to communicate himself to us; and we are unwilling to take the trouble to prepare ourselves for so great a blessing: He invites us to his holy table; and we seek a hundred frivolous pretences to put off his loving invitation: He has left us this inestimable pledge of his love, as a lasting token to remember him by; and we seldom afford him a serious thought: Finally, he covets nothing more than to abide for ever in us, and we shake him off as soon as he comes to us; sometimes by our undevout behaviour after Communion, and other times by returning soon after to our vomit.

But is it to be always so? Shall we always continue in this slothful way, and never think of making him some better requital for his infinite love? Is there not a day to come, wherein we shall be accountable for all favours either neglected or abused? 'Tis this we ought at present to reflect seriously upon, in order to work ourselves seriously into a sincere and hearty resolution, *first*, to correct whatever neglect we have hitherto been guilty of, in not having at due times frequented the holy sacraments; and, *2dly*, whenever this duty calls upon us, to perform it so as to answer fully all the ends for which these blessings were designed.

It were to be heartily wished indeed, that all Christians would dispose themselves weekly for this holy table: However, since this is rather to be

wished than hoped for, at least no business ought to hinder any one from communicating once a month: They ought to consider, that the holy Communion is the food and nourishment of their souls; which can no more live any considerable time without it, than their bodies can subsist without a competent allowance of meat and drink: And therefore, as no pretence of business ever hinders them from nourishing their bodies, so ought it not to hinder them from nourishing their souls; and if any temporal concerns prevail upon them to neglect this duty, 'tis a manifest sign they have a greater concern for the one than for the other; and this want of concern for their eternal interest, is a convincing proof that they are already dangerously sick in soul.

Care however must be taken, that whoever approaches to the holy table, this duty be so performed, that his soul may become partaker of the spiritual nourishment for which it is ordained: He must therefore receive the bread of angels with a clean heart, with a deep sense of gratitude for so inestimable a blessing, a sincere acknowledgment of his own unworthiness, a firm belief of our Saviour's real presence, a hearty confidence in his infinite goodness, and an unfeigned love of him.

After communion, he must entertain the divine guest he has received, with all the affections of his soul; unbosom his heart entirely to him; lay before him all his spiritual distempers; acknowledging his absolute dependence on him; He must importune him, with the two disciples of *Emmaus*, to stay with him, to be the life and health of his soul, a preservative against the corruption of the world, his strength and security against all temptations, his support and
comfort

comfort in his daily afflictions, and his guide to a happy eternity.

THE SIXTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE ADVANTAGE OF AFFLICTIONS.

We must, through many tribulations, enter into the kingdom of God. Act. xiv. 21.

IT is enough that it is God's eternal and unchangeable decree, that the way to Heaven must be *through many tribulations*. This alone suffices to render our obligations of submitting to it indispensable; and it would be a criminal presumption, to question the infinite wisdom and justice of God's law, or ask the Divine Creator why he has made us so? However, since all means appointed by God have a natural tendency to their end, we may be allowed to inquire how it is that prosperity obstructs, and adversity is naturally conducing to the eternal good of our souls; which I intend to do in this entertainment, by shewing both the prejudice men usually receive by the one, and the advantages that usually attend the other.

I observe three great advantages in the sufferings of this life, which, if duly considered, will in a great measure allay their bitterness, and dispose us at least to a patient submission to them. *First*, they are a proper means to disengage the heart from a love of the world. *Secondly*, they are an occasion of our improvement in virtue; and, *Thirdly*, they instruct us in the knowledge of ourselves. That they are a proper means to disengage the heart from the love of the world, is clearly insinuated in these words of Solomon, Prov. xvii. 3. *As silver is tried by fire,*

fire, and gold in the furnace, so God tries the hearts of men. For as fire not only tries, but refines gold, by separating it from its alloy, so Almighty God both tries the hearts of men in the furnace of adversity, and, at the same time, purifies them from the dross of earthly affections, which debase the soul, and sink her beneath the dignity of her spiritual nature: For, since man's soul is created to love and enjoy an infinite good, she degrades herself by setting her affections upon creatures, and to deliver her from this state of degradation, the love that causes it must be removed.

Now crosses and afflictions are the fittest for this purpose. The reason is, because since contrary causes cannot but produce contrary effects, it follows, that as we are naturally inclined to love those, by whom we find ourselves cherished and caressed, so we are no less apt to take a dislike to those who use us unkindly, and consequently as it is the ordinary effect of prosperity to make us fond of the world, so nothing can be more proper to put us out of conceit with it than adversity. We need not use much violence to our inclinations, to quit a treacherous friend, there being no better cure for love, than ill usage: As long as the world smiles upon us, as long as it is ready to flatter our inclinations, and every thing goes according to our heart's desire, 'tis a difficult task to wean our affections from it: But when the world turns cross and ill-natured; when instead of furnishing us with conveniences and pleasures, it loads us with miseries and crosses, the work is more than half done to our hands; the mean obstacle to God's grace being already removed for us: Oh, then we are apt to reflect how treacherous a friend this world is, and how great a folly it is to set our hearts upon
it:

it: Then we begin to see the vanity of earthly joys, and seek that happiness above, which we find the world either cannot, or refuses to afford us.

The rod and reproof give wisdom, says Solomon; and indeed, if any thing will make us truly wise, the rod of afflictions is most likely to do it. Prosperity, like the fumes of wine, is but apt to turn the brain, and intoxicate the mind; and adversity is the proper remedy for this spiritual drunkenness: It opens our eyes, and discovers clearly the cheat and vanity of earthly goods, by giving us an experimental knowledge of their emptiness and inconstancy: It convinces the judgment, that the world is not the fine thing men usually take it to be; and when the judgment is once thoroughly convinced of this truth, the heart is in a fair way of being cured of its former dotage: And therefore when our heavenly physician sees us so love-sick of the world, that ordinary remedies, I mean his ordinary inspirations, are ineffectual, and that we go on obstinately poisoning ourselves still more and more with the pleasures of it; his usual method, in this case, is to take away from us these bewitching enjoyments, which chiefly nourished the distemper; that the cause of the evil being thus removed, his healing grace may meet no obstacle to hinder it from working a complete and perfect cure.

We have a remarkable figure of this truth, in the person of the *prodigal son*; who, as long as he had means to gratify his passions, continued in all his irregular courses, and never thought of returning to his father: But as soon as he was deprived of those means, and extremity of want had put it out of his power to enjoy any longer his beloved pleasures; he immediately
entered

entered into himself, and began to reflect on the folly he had committed, in leaving his father's house: Whereupon he resolved to go, without delay, and throw himself at his father's feet, to make his peace with him.

Now many imitate the undutifulness of this *prodigal son*, in removing themselves at a distance from their Heavenly Father, and giving themselves over to the sinful lusts and pleasures of this life: And this is usually the unhappy case of those that are blessed with plenty: Their riches are, for the most part, made the instruments and support of vice; they grow wanton with ease and over pampering, and prosperity makes them not only forget their benefactor, but even abuse him with his own gifts. I appeal to any man's observation, whether it be not so: For, cast but an eye amongst sinners, and see who are the persons most remarkable for scandalous irregularities? Are they not the rich, who are the great patrons of lewdness, vanity, intemperance, idleness and prodigality? Are they not your men of plentiful fortunes, who are furnished with means to be at the charge of these expensive vices? So that, upon a general view of mankind, it will appear that sin abounds most where temporal blessings are most plentifully bestowed.

And how then must these prodigals be reclaimed from their evil ways, and obliged to return to their Heavenly Father? Truly, where Almighty God has a peculiar mercy in store, to retrieve those that are thus gone astray, affliction is the expedient he generally makes use of, to prepare them for this blessing: And 'tis, without dispute, of all expedients the most natural: *First*, because it disarms their enemy, by taking away from them the things that took their hearts

from



from God, and removing the main obstacle of their return to him: *Secondly*, Because it helps to weaken their passions, by depriving them of the objects that chiefly fomented them, and putting it out of their power to gratify them as formerly: And, *lastly*, by embittering the world to them, and making that become their cross which formerly was their delight; it obliges them to seek their comfort in the hopes of a better world hereafter: And thus it is our merciful Father many times withdraws the world from us, when he sees us obstinately resolved not to withdraw our affections from the world; compelling us, as it were, by this merciful expedient, to raise our hearts above the earth, and make Heaven the chief object of our desires.

But as afflictions are a sovereign remedy against the love of the world, by way of cure, so are they no less useful by way of prevention, as is evident from all the reasons I have insisted upon, which holds for the one as well as the other: And 'tis not to be doubted, but when God sends afflictions to those whose hearts are yet untainted, he designs them for this end; and the mercy seems the greater, by as much as it is better to be wholly preserved from infection, than to stand in need of being cured of it. This is a solid comfort to all such as have ever been afflicted with poverty, and forced to earn their bread with hard toil and labour: For when they consider how generally riches are abused, what numberless sins are occasioned by them, and how few of those that possess them give any hopes of their living in a state of salvation, they have reason enough to conclude, that if God had favoured them with plenty, they would, in all likelihood, have set their hearts as much upon the world, and made as ill use of his

blessings as others : And that whereas their poverty, hard fare, and labour, have not only contributed to weaken their passions, but even put it out of their power to gratify them in any notorious manner ; riches might have engaged them, as it has many others, in a thousand scandalous extravagancies, and been the cause of their everlasting ruin.

And ought they not then, instead of being always upon the fret, and apt to murmur at the dispensations of the Almighty ; ought they not, I say, to be heartily content with their condition, and ever acknowledge a providential mercy, in their being kept out of the reach of those dangerous temptations, by which infinite numbers are daily overcome ? Ought they not to count it a blessing to be deprived of such blessings, as through their abuse of them, would, in all likelihood, have betrayed them to eternal curses ? Truly, if they have any belief of a future state, or value for what may be a help to make them happy in it, this consideration must comfort them at least so far as to quell all murmurs, and make them submit to the circumstances, which the Almighty has appointed for them, with patience and peace of mind.

But to proceed to the two latter heads mentioned by me, both reason and experience teach us, that afflictions are not only a sovereign remedy against the love of the world, but an occasion of improvement in many excellent virtues : I need but instance in that of *humility* which is the ground-work of all the rest : For we may confidently say, adversity is the mother, nurse, and guardian of it ; since nothing is more rare, than to find men truly humble in a prosperous and flourishing condition ; because nothing is more difficult than to preserve an
humble

humble mind, when all things concur to inspire us with great ideas of ourselves. This made St. *Auſtin* ſay, that it is a more than ordinary happineſs not to be overcome with wordly felicity; and that it is much eaſier not to ſink under adverſity, than not to be elevated at proſperity.

The reaſon hereof is, becauſe man's nature is much more inclined to pride, than to dejection or deſpair; and ſtands more in need of humiliations than encouragements, to keep the balance of the ſoul equal. Almoſt every triſle ſuffices to ſwell us with vanity; but it muſt be a very great load of miſfortune to ſink us into deſpair: For do we not find, that any one good quality, whether of mind or body, though joined with many groſs defects both of the one and the other, ſuffices to make us ſet a value on ourſelves? Are we not many times inſolent and haughty with a little ſucceſs, though blind chance had perhaps the greateſt ſhare in it? Will not a little applauſe or commendation, though ever ſo undeſerved, nay even bare-faced flattery, exalt us in our own conceit? Nay, how many are puffed up with pride merely upon the account of wealth, though they have nothing elſe to recommend them? How many again value themſelves upon their conſtitution, a well-ſhaped body, a handſome face, a fine ſuit of clothes, a gaudy equipage, and ſuch like fooleries? For pride is a paſſion of that ſtrange nature, that it will even feed upon imaginary excellencies, and mere airy fancies, when it has nothing real and ſolid to ſubſiſt upon: Whence we may gather how ſtrongly nature is inclined to it; and how much we ſtand in need of ſome conſiderable counterpoize to balance the ſoul, and bring her down to a juſt pitch of Chriſtian humility.

Now

Now what can be more likely to do us this good office, than crosses and afflictions? Prosperity is, doubtless, only proper to add more fuel to the fire: For since we are so apt to be proud and vain, even when we have little or nothing to incite us to it, is it not evident, that prosperity must needs heighten this passion to a very great degree: since almost every circumstance, relating to that state, contributes more or less to nourish the distemper? For, *first*, As to the power and authority that usually attends a plentiful fortune, is there any thing more apt to raise mens thoughts, and swell them with high ideas of themselves? *Secondly*, As to the honour, respect, deference, and attendance, usually paid to those whom fortune smiles upon; do not all these things contribute to inflame the humour? *Lastly*, The exorbitant praises and flatteries, which are seldom wanting where any thing is to be hoped for; are they not just so much oil thrown upon a flame?

Hence it is, that prosperity has generally the unhappy effect upon mens minds; that whereas they see themselves distinguished from others in their fortunes, it makes them also fancy themselves distinguished from them in their intrinsic worth and value; and to set up, as it were, for precious things, made up of some better matter than their fellow mortals, and only placed in the world to be respected, waited on, and idolized by them: Nor is this any exaggeration, since both sacred and prophane history furnish us with several instances of persons, whom a long course of prosperous fortune swelled to that height of pride, as to make them even forget they were men, and set up for Gods. This, indeed, is the highest degree of madness, rather than pride; However, it shews what influence prosperity

prosperity has upon mens minds ; and though it produces but seldom these monstrous effects, it generally raises us high enough to make us stand in need of very considerable humiliations, to bring us down to a moderate temper, and true Christian sense of ourselves.

Now, from the rule of contraries, it follows, that afflictions are the only natural course for this dangerous imposthume of the mind : For if prosperity causes, or at least inflames the distemper, afflictions must needs abate it : If prosperity swells the heart, afflictions cannot but be a means to humble it : And the reason is because they make us enter seriously into ourselves, by putting us in mind, that we are not only men, but in the lowest rank of men ; that is, poor criminals, smarting under the scourge of divine justice, and only worthy of chastisements : Which considerations lay the most solid foundation of Christian humility, and are the best cure for pride.

Thus, the wicked *Manasses*, who insulted God on the throne, became humble and penitent, under the weight of his chains : Thus likewise the proud *Nabuchodonosor*, who, in the height of prosperity, would needs be worshipped as a God ; being dethroned, and reduced to a condition even beneath that of man, acknowledged the hand that struck him, and humbled himself under it : So that we may confidently say, this excellent virtue of humility is scarce ever secure, but under the shelter of adversity : It is a plant that seldom grows in a rich soil ; it is a child that thrives best under a strict and severe discipline : The smiles and caresses of fortune, like the over-indulgence of a fond mother, contribute only to its ruin. Many souls have been killed with this sort of kindness, and
many

many others owe their everlasting happiness to what the world calls misfortunes, How many sinners have been reclaimed this way! How many are now saints in Heaven, who must confess, that sickness, poverty, disgrace, or some other affliction, has been the happy occasion of their having been humbled into those dispositions, which fitted them for the state of bliss! And that if the world had continued to smile upon them, their pride had brought them to their everlasting ruin!

Lastly, Afflictions, as I told you, instruct us in the knowledge of ourselves; by undeceiving us many times, as to the false opinions we are apt to have of our own virtue: For men are strangely subject to delude themselves in this point, and mistake their speculative ideas of virtue for virtue itself. How many, whilst they had nothing to trouble them, have strangely fancied themselves able to suffer any thing for God's sake! But when it came to the trial, have found, by sad experience, they were not the courageous men they took themselves for, and were taught to know themselves better. Thus, whilst the danger was at a distance, St. Peter valued himself upon his courage, and boasted he would rather die than deny his Master: But, being put to the proof, his heart failed him, and instructed him in the knowledge of his own weakness.

And so it happens many times with us: We are stout as heroes, as long as the enemy is out of sight: We think we can suffer great matters, as long as there is nothing to suffer: Some hot fit of devotion warms the imagination into many strong-fancied resolutions: We make acts of *patience, humility, resignation*, to the will of God, and so forth: And though all this be no
more

more than the bravery of soldiers in a mock fight, we are apt to believe ourselves to be, in effect, what we then seemingly resolve to be: But in the day of battle it appears what we truly are. We may then certainly inform ourselves, whether our patience, humility, and resignation to the will of God, be real, or only imaginary: And therefore, afflictions are, in the scripture-language, called *Trials*; because they are the proof of virtue: They are the touchstone upon which it is tried, and by them we may infallibly know whether it be true or counterfeit gold; and whether it be in the heart, as well as in the intellect or imagination.

You see then what considerable advantages afflictions bring with them; how sovereign a remedy they are against the poisonous love of the world; how they cure us of our pride, and instruct us in the knowledge of ourselves: And are not these advantages considerable enough to challenge, at least, an hearty submission to any affliction Almighty God shall send us? It is evident, they contribute to facilitate our passage to a better life; at least by removing obstacles, and diminishing the dangers of it: And therefore, whoever has a true concern for his eternal interest, cannot reasonably be dissatisfied, if God wills to allot him his portion, amongst the sufferers in this life; since, in so doing, he only takes care to put him in a safer way to Heaven, than he would have chosen, had he been left to carve for himself: And ought not then all suffering Christians to be sensible, that God has dealt favourably with them, in having secured them from the dangers by which thousands have perished eternally? Ought they not to forbear murmuring, and submit chearfully to their condition; when it is manifest, that all the reason they have

have to murmur is, because Almighty God has removed them out of the occasion of making themselves unhappy for ever? Here, surely, is motive enough to make them be at least resigned, even under the heaviest crosses; and pray to God, with their whole hearts, that his holy will may ever be accomplished.

THE SIXTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

MOTIVES OF COMFORT IN THE SUFFERINGS OF
THIS LIFE.

John in chains. Math. xi. 2.

JOHN in prison, and loaden with chains, is both the comfort and instruction of all suffering Christians. He is their comfort, in giving them occasion to reflect, that if Almighty God permit them now to be afflicted, they receive no harder measure than his best friends have done before them: He is also their instruction in teaching them, that suffering in this life is the ordinary portion of the just; because most proper to fit them for the joys of the life to come. 'Tis true, self-love cannot relish this Christian philosophy, being ever apt to consider afflictions on their most unfavourable side, and as they are a grievance to nature, under which consideration there appears nothing in them but what creates uneasiness and aversion.

However, since we find, by experience, that the most loathsome and painful remedies are cheerfully submitted to the patient, because he hopes to find ease and benefit by them; 'tis also to be hoped, that if we consult Faith, and reason directed by it, we may discover such solid motives

motives of comfort in the sufferings of this life, as will suffice to make us receive them with the most cheerful submission: The proper motives therefore to work in us this Christian disposition, shall be the subject of this discourse.

The *first* consideration which ought to make us receive afflictions with a cheerful submission, is, that they are a mark and pledge of God's love. The history of *Tobias* gives us an undoubted instance of this truth: This holy man had been, from his infancy, brought up in the fear of God, and practice of all religious duties: But the virtue he most excelled in, was his unwearied charity to his afflicted brethren; whom, in the time of their captivity, he relieved to the utmost of his power, and even with the hazard of his life. Almighty God had many ways tried the virtue of his faithful servant, and at length was pleased to visit him with the loss of both his eyes; which affliction, though very grievous in itself, was much aggravated by the unjust reproaches of his wife and kindred; who, instead of comforting him in his misfortune, insulted over him; accused him of weakness and folly, for having vainly trusted in God; and asking him in a reproachful manner, if these were the fruits of his past alms and good works.

But Almighty God soon after convinced them of their error; and made it appear that the affliction he had sent his servant, was not a mark of his anger, but a token of his favour: For when the angel *Raphael*, who had conducted his son in his journey to *Rages*, and back again, was upon the point of discovering himself; he first assured him, that his alms and works of mercy had been highly pleasing to God, and then told him, that the true reason why God hath

hath sent him so great an affliction was, because he was acceptable to him. *And because thou wert acceptable to God, it was necessary that affliction should try thee.*

But let the case of *St. John Baptist*, as it is represented in the gospel, whence I have taken my text, serve for a second instance of this truth. He was undoubtedly a particular favourite of Heaven, and a person of extraordinary merit; as having been miraculously sanctified in his mother's womb; chosen by God to be the forerunner of the Saviour of the world, and honoured by Christ himself with the greatest character that was ever given of any man: And yet, this child of God, this darling of Heaven, and favourite of *Jesus Christ*, is thrown into prison, and loaden with chains, expecting hourly the stroke of death; whilst the wicked and incestuous *Herod* enjoyed a prosperous reign, and wallowed in all the pleasures the world could afford him: And is not this again an evident proof, that sufferings are the ordinary portion of the just in this life, and pledges of their being in God's favour?

However, not to content ourselves with a few particular instances of this nature; let us take a view of all the known and celebrated saints, since the creation of the world, down to this very age; and we shall find, they were all made to drink large draughts of the bitter cup of afflictions. In the *first* place, we shall meet with innumerable champions of *Christ*, let loose to the brutal rage and malice of the bloodiest tyrants: *Secondly*, innumerable confessors, made the scorn and reproach of men; and infinite numbers undergoing a lingering martyrdom, in banishments or prisons, in the loss of friends, forfeiture of estates, painful sicknesses, and, in a word,

a word, in all the hardest trials of poverty, abjection and contempt. Now, were not all these eminent sufferers, God's peculiar friends and the darlings of Heaven? They were undoubtedly so. And therefore, since we find that Almighty God has ever been pleased to carry his best servants through the most painful trials; and that not one of those, whose eternal happiness we are unquestionably assured of, has been exempt from sufferings; nothing is more evident, than that afflictions are favours, which God bestows upon his best servants as the most undoubted marks and pledges of his love.

St. Paul is very large upon this argument, in his epistle to the *Hebrews*, Chap. xii. His words are very remarkable, and challenge a particular attention. *My son, says he, despise not the chastisement of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked by him: For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If you endure chastisement, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he, whom the father chastiseth not? But if ye are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then you are bastards and not sons.* You see, St. Paul lays it here down for an undoubted maxim, *that God chastises all he loves*; that to be scourged by him is to be treated as a son; and that there is no having a share in God's favour, without being a sufferer in this life; in a word, to be afflicted, according to St. Paul, is to be marked with the character of the *elect*; and to be without affliction, is to bear the mark of a *reprobate*, and one excluded out of the number of God's children.

Truly, if we consider these words of the *apostle* as divine oracles, and prompted by the spirit of truth; the prosperity of this world, instead of yielding any comfort, would be a strange alarm

alarm to such as are allowed an undisturbed enjoyment of it; and, on the contrary, whenever Almighty God should please to visit us with any affliction, instead of being dejected under it, and giving way to melancholy and sadness, we should receive it with joy, and not only submit to, but even kiss the hand that chastises us. All our complaints and murmurs would be turned into praises and thanksgivings. We should reason thus with ourselves: It is my loving Father has presented me with this token of his kindness; he has visited me with this gentle correction, to shew he has not yet utterly cast me off, as my sins have deserved: He is still pleased to treat me as one of his children, though I have many times forfeited my title: And ought I not then to be cheerfully resigned to his divine pleasure? Ought I not to praise and bless his holy name, for thus correcting me in his mercy, instead of punishing me in his wrath? These, I say, would be the sincere sentiments of our hearts if we considered things with eyes of Faith; and not merely as they are agreeable or disagreeable to flesh and blood.

But if, without pretending to pry into God's secret counsels, we may, for the improving and strengthening our faith, be allowed to consider the reasons why God should treat his servants with this seeming rigour; the *first* that offers itself is, because God's love of the predestinate consists chiefly in his desiring and procuring them real and substantial good. Now, man's greatest good in the world is to condemn the world, and make Heaven the sole object of his desires. And since, as I have shewed in my preceding discourse, prosperity is apt to draw the heart from God, and fix it upon creatures; therefore Almighty God, to preserve those he
loves

loves from this misfortune, takes care the world shall be uneasy to them, and so give them no encouragement to be fond of it; but oblige them to seek their content elsewhere. And who sees not that there is so much of goodness and mercy in this expedient, though seemingly severe, as to deserve the most grateful acknowledgments our hearts can make him for it?

The *second* is, because since even the most virtuous Christians are subject to many sinful imperfections; and all sin whatsoever must be satisfied for, either in this world or the next; Almighty God, who knows to what rigour the very last farthing will be exacted hereafter, is graciously pleased to furnish those he loves with means to satisfy his justice at a much easier rate; by obliging them to suffer something in this life, which being offered up in the spirit of penance, his goodness, in consideration hereof, is willing to release the great debt, either wholly or in part, which they were otherwise obliged to pay. So that suffering in this world, if but rightly managed, and not rendered useless by a wilful indiscretion, is as great an advantage to sinners, as it would be to a person overwhelmed with debts, to have it in his power to clear them all, or at least, discharge the greatest part, by only making an acknowledgment of some inconsiderable trifle to his creditors. And as it would be an act of uncommon generosity in a creditor, not only to accept of, but even to furnish his debtors with means to make him this acknowledgment; so we cannot sufficiently admire the divine bounty, for putting into our hands the opportunity of cancelling, with so much ease, the great debt we have contracted with him.

The *third* and last reason is, because *Christ*, who is the pattern of all Christians, having been
pleased

pleased to chuse a suffering life for himself, it is requisite that every Christian should be conformable to him in this point: *First*, because, as the gospel tells us, *the perfection of a disciple consists in being like his master*: And, *Secondly*, because, according to St. Paul's doctrine, God has decreed that one condition necessary to prepare the predestinate for the state of blifs, shall be their *conformity to the image of his Son*. Whence it follows, that by their being sufferers like him, they are perfected in this life, and fitted for the life to come: And so it is no wonder, that the love God bears the predestinate should prompt him to furnish them with suitable means to procure them this double blessing.

Hence follows another comfortable consideration, wherewith I will end, to wit, that the afflictions of this life entitle us to everlasting joys: For the same divine lips that pronounced this terrible sentence, *Woe be to you who laugh, for ye shall weep hereafter*, have also delivered this comfortable truth, *blest are they who weep, for they shall be comforted*; and our Saviour had no sooner told his apostles, that *the world should rejoice, and they should be sorrowful*, but he immediately allayed the bitterness of this sentence with the following promise, *but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*. Our dear Redeemer calls us indeed to a share in his sufferings, but upon these advantageous terms, that we shall hereafter be partners with him in his glory; he invites us now to a part of his bitter-cup, but upon promise to admit us hereafter to the full torrent of heavenly delights. And is not this a solid comfort to a Christian soul? Is it not a cordial to revive our spirits under the heaviest load of afflictions? Can we be unwilling to suffer upon terms of such advantage? To pass through

through short afflictions to eternal rest? To endure some small pain or trouble, for a happiness that will never end?

For, are not all sufferings short and small, when compared with joys that are infinite and everlasting? *St. Paul* allows them in a manner no duration at all in the comparison; but calls them *light and momentary*: Nay, they might justly be called *momentary*, though they should last a man's whole life without intermission; because even the very longest term of years we can imagine, has less proportion to eternity, than one single minute has to whole ages. Now, who of us all would not be willingly afflicted for some moments, upon condition he were to be completely happy his whole life after? And ought we not then even to rejoice in the afflictions of this life, since a whole eternity of joys may be purchased with them.

Hear how our Saviour presses this argument to his apostles: *Blessed are ye, says he, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake, rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.* You see he pronounces them blessed, when they shall be under persecution and affliction; and exhorts them to *rejoice and be exceeding glad*: And, why so? *Because their reward is great in Heaven.* This has been the comfort of all saints that have gone before us: They have all passed through many tribulations to the kingdom of Heaven. They were content to *sow in tears*, because they were assured they should hereafter *reap in joy*. Let this then also be our comfort; let the hope and expectation of those blessed joys support us under the sufferings of this life; and when the weight of any trouble begins to press hard upon the soul, let

us

us reflect that crosses and afflictions are the kindest pledges of God's love, the surest marks of predestination, and the seeds of everlasting glory.

These considerations, if often repeated, and deeply imprinted in the mind, will by degrees work nature into a ready acquiescence to whatever Almighty God shall ordain: Not that they will utterly stifle all inward disturbances, or prevent all sudden surprizes of grief: For flesh and blood will have their grains of allowance; constitution and temper must also be considered: nor can the workings of an unruly imagination be altogether suppressed: But the purpose they are chiefly designed to be serviceable to, is to keep the heart at least in steady subjection to the will of God, even whilst the sensitive part of the soul seems to mutiny and rebel: If they have not force enough to dispel all clouds of sadness, they will, at least, so far, hinder them from darkening the soul, that the light of Faith and Reason will still have the chief direction of her: Finally, they will moderate our grief, and keep it under restraint; though they cannot utterly destroy it. This, I say, is the use they are intended for; and therefore when I said that the forementioned considerations will make us receive afflictions, not only with patience, but even with joy, my meaning is not, that we shall be delighted with the painful part of our sufferings, but that in spite of their disagreeableness to sense and nature, we shall find motives enough to rejoice in them; not for their own sake, but as the will of God is considered in them, and for the blessing they entitle us to: So that whilst the body is smarting under the scourge, the soul may be filled with comfort and joy, in seeing herself in so good a way to the secure and everlasting possession of the infinite good for which she is created

F I N I S.

A GENERAL INDEX

OF THE
PRINCIPAL MATTERS TREATED ON

IN THE SECOND VOLUME OF
THESE ENTERTAINMENTS.

ACTIONS *not referable to God*, are not conducted with a principal view to salvation Page 19

— *referable to God*, may be rendered conducing to salvation 22

Afflictions are the peculiar portion of the just in this life, and the surest pledge of God's love and favours 76

Andrew (St.) was transported with joy at the sight of the cross on which he was to die 80

Austin, (St.) his sense of virtuous actions, after his conversion 69

Adversity discovers to us the vanity and emptiness of earthly goods 299

— is the mother, nurse, and guardian of humility 302

Affability, and caution in our words necessary, in order to prevent giving persons affront, and to dispose them to harken favourably to our advice 195

— and an obliging air will greatly enable us to

do good to our neighbour by our admonitions or advice Page 195

Afflictions afford us matter of real and great advantage; because,

1. They are a proper means to disengage the heart from the love of the world 297

2. They are an occasion of our improvement in virtue ib.

3. They instruct us in the knowledge of ourselves ib.

— are a sovereign remedy against the love of the world, and the most natural means to reclaim licentious livers,

1. By disarming the moral enemy of their souls 300

2. By weakening their passions 301

3. By imbittering the world to them ib.

— when sent to those whose hearts are not yet tainted with the love of the world, are intended as preventions to that evil ib.

— greatly help to nourish humility in us 302

— make us see and know our-

- ourselves, both as we are
 men, and as we are crimi-
 nals *Page* 305
Afflictions, are the means of se-
 curing our everlasting hap-
 piness 306
 — prove the reality of our
 virtues *ib.*
 — why called *trials* 307
 — put men in a safe way
 to Heaven *ib.*
 — have ever been the lot
 of God's best servants 308
 — have such solid motives
 of comfort as may suffice to
 make us receive them with
 submission 309
 — have been the share of all
 the saints of God from the
 creation of the world 310
 — are favours God be-
 stows on his best servants, as
 the most undoubted marks
 and pledges of his love
 309, 311
 — are evidences of our be-
 ing the children of God 312
 — wean our hearts from
 this world *ib.*
 — sent to God's best ser-
 vants, as a punishment for
 their sins in this life, that
 they may have entire hap-
 piness to receive hereafter
 313
 — should be received and
 offered up in the *spirit of*
penance *ib.*
 — are sweetened to us,
 by remembering that *Christ*
 our Lord chose a suffering
 life for himself; to whose
 example they render us
 conformable 314
 — entitle us to everlasting
 joy *ib.*
 — are short and small,
 when compared with joys
 that are infinite and ever-
 lasting 315
- Affront* given to *Christ*, in the
 person of his *ambassador*, by
 concealment of sins in confession
Page 251, 255
Ananias and *Sapphira*, their
 crime and punishment con-
 sidered, and applied to the
 sin of *lying in confession* 256
Assistance of Heaven, to be
 sought after at our entrance
 on any state of life 145
 — neglect of it, is *tempt-*
ing God *ib.*
Attendance, frequently on di-
 vine Offices, is the indispen-
 sable duty of persons of lei-
 sure 246
Avarice and ambition, so fill
 men with solitudes, as to
 make them forget Almight-
 y God 245
Authoritative way, of deliver-
 ing our opinions, seldom,
 meets with the desired effect,
 of convincing the judgment
 of the person spoken to
 205
Bad company, to be utterly
 avoided 36
 — by their example, ge-
 nerally influence more than
 good 27
Backwardness to converse with,
or speak friendly to any per-
son, is a sure indication of
secret malice yet retained in
 the heart against him
 189
Bishop of Laodicea, an instance
 of the danger of a luke-
 warm christian 125
Blessed Virgin, must be con-
 sidered no otherwise than
 as a mere, though a pure
 creature, and therefore, in-
 finitely below God, and in-
 debted to him for all her
 gifts of grace and glory
 214
Blessed Virgin, Devotion to her,
 in

- in a *relative honour*, terminating wholly in God *ib.*
- is the most excellent of mere creatures 215
- the *holy fathers* are abundantly large in the *exalted panegyrics* of her dignity, holiness, and purity *ib.*
- has no other part in the salvation of men, than that of *begging and interceding*, but aspires not to the honour of being a *mediator of reconciliation or redemption* 217
- presents our petitions to God, and joins her prayers with ours *ib.*
- the extraordinary graces bestowed on her :
1. In being elected from all eternity to be the *mother of God* 218
 2. In being *sanctified* in her *mother's womb* in the very moment of her conception *ib.*
 3. In having been preserved throughout the whole course of her life from all *spot or stain of actual sin*; and excelling in all virtues; particularly in her *humility* 219
 4. In her being *over-shadowed* by the power and virtue of the *Holy Ghost*, and so remaining a pure virgin at the same time as she became the *true and natural mother of God* 220
 5. In her glorious *assumption* into Heaven 221
- why called by the Church the *Queen of Heaven* 218
- is the only saint whose *conception* as well as *nativity* is solemnized by the Church by a particular festival *ib.*
- her will always perfectly subject to her reason 219
- was exempted from the curse laid on *Eve* and her whole sex, of bringing forth in pain Page 220
- her *humility*, the exceeding greatness of it 221
- after her *assumption into Heaven*, she is seated nearest to the person of *Jesus Christ* and honoured by *angels and saints* as their *Queen &c.* *ib.*
- is possessed of all the conditions requisite to qualify her for the office of an *intercessor* *ib.*
- her *charity* for the souls of men is inexpressibly great 222
- why called by the Church the *mother of mercy* *ib.*
- her exalted *dignity* and *virtues* are a sufficient ground and encouragement to pay a particular devotion to her 223
- her *interest in the court of Heaven* will never fail; but she will ever surpass all saints in holiness and in acceptableness to God *ib.*
- Reason of her being so frequently addressed to, is because we have more confidence in her prayers than in our own 224
- Blessed Virgin*, why called by the Church the *refuge of sinners* 226
- Imitation of her virtues is the mark we ought to set before us in our practice of devotion to her *ib.*
- Prayers for her intercession, without quitting the habits of sin, will avail nothing *ib.*
- Her *protection* to be implored every morning and evening 228
- Festivals*

- *Festivals* observed in honour of her all *solemn days*, and to be observed with a serious and distinguished devotion, both private and public. *Page* 229
- Blind Beggar*, his history explained and applied to our practice 154
- is a figure of a spiritual blindness of a sinful soul *ib.*
- Catholics* in *England*, being subject to the severest *penal laws*, ought therefore to be continually exercised in all virtues and prepared for the hardest trials of our Faith 105
- Christ* is the pattern of suffering christians 96
- all his actions of infinite value *ib.*
- Torments he endured in the time of his passion, must be attributed to the desire he had to suffer for us; being over and above the full price of our ransom *ib.*
- Christ*; most considerable events of his life seem to have a tendency to his death on the cross 97
- the pressing desire and haste he shewed in relation to his death 98
- His desire of death not inconsistent with his *prayer* and *agony* in the garden 101
- submitted to and overcame his sufferings for our comfort, example and instruction 102
- Love in suffering and dying for us 83
- Weeping when he raised up his friend *Lazarus*, shewed his kindness and concern for him; Much more must his dying for us his enemies, shew the greatness of his love for mankind *Page* 84
- Christians* have no other business in this world, than to save their souls, or such as tends to that end 24
- feel a joy in suffering for the love of *Christ* 80
- Christianity*, if merely nominal, no better than paganism 6
- is an order in which religious and *laicks* are all included 31
- Conquest* over ourselves in lesser matters is a necessary step to qualify us to overcome in the greatest conflicts 105
- Corruptions* of the world, preservatives against them 35, 55
- Censures* or persecutions of the world must not discourage us from our duty 237
- Charity* gives every virtue its full value 189
- to our neighbour often made the pretence of a thwarting and contradicting temper 196
- when it is a proper motive to contradict him, must be qualified with certain conditions 197, 202
- Children* should be brought up in the greatest abhorrence of lying 258
- from little excuses at first easily contract a habit of downright lying *ib.*
- Christ* prefers the duty of love and charity before sacrifice 174
- in his sermon on the Mount rectifies the misinterpretations which the *Jews* *is*

if doctors had put on the
Mosaick law Page 174

Christ's yoke, is not a tyrannical
law

— *Example* in dying for his
enemies proves our obliga-
tion to love our enemies

179

— *Patience* in bearing all
manner of affronts and in-
dignities 180

— *whole life*, from his birth
to his death, was a continu-
al pattern and example to
us of loving our enemies. *ib.*

— *washing the feet of Judas*
was an instance not only of
his humility, but of his love
and charity to his greatest
enemies 181

— *instituting the Eucharist* to
be a lasting token to remember
him by, is a convincing
proof of the greatness of
his love, and shews him act-
ing here in the part both
of a parent and of a friend

285

*Christians of a scrupulous con-
science* torment themselves
with continual fears with-
out cause 140

Christians of scrupulous conscience;
some truths briefly recom-
mended to their conside-
ration 131

— their case is difficult to
be cured *ib.*

— ought to depend on the
direction of their confessor
ib.

Chrysostome (St. John) his eulo-
gium of the ever blessed
Virgin 215

Civility and good manners are
not only the ornaments of
human life, but even a part
of Christian duty 208

— naturally flow from the

practice of the christian
virtues of humility, meekness,
and charity Page 209

*Coldness or indifferency in a mar-
ried state* is but one remove
from hatred or aversion

212

— *of behaviour after receiving
the Eucharist*, seems to argue
either a neglect or shame of
Christ, and preference to our
own inclinations, diversions,
or entertainments 293

*Coldness of behaviour after re-
ceiving the Eucharist*, is an
imitation of the ungrateful
conduct of the *Gerazens* 294

— is the cause of a conti-
nual subjection to relapses
and deficiency in the per-
formance of daily duties

294

Collyridians, their heresy, in
worshipping the Blessed Vir-
gin as a kind of goddess 167

Combat between flesh and blood
necessary to our spiritual
death 134

*Complaisance, mutual endearments
and civility*, are of the great-
est imaginable importance to
be constantly preserved be-
twixt married persons 211

Concealment of sins in confession is
a stratagem of the devil;

1. To gratify his own pride;
and, 2. To perpetuate the
slavery of the sinners to him

250

— the sin and aggravations
hereof; 1. Sacrilege, 2.
Hypocrisy; 3. Ingratitude;
4. Lying to the Holy Ghost

251

— is an affront to Jesus
Christ, in the person of his
ambassador 252, 253

— folly hereof—

1. Because sins cannot be
con-

- concealed from the knowledge of Almighty God
Page 260
2. Because whatever sins are now concealed, must at some time or other of our lives be confessed, or else we must renounce all hopes of salvation *267*
 — the shame and confusion which shall attend this sin in the world to come, shall be infinitely greater than any confusion which can possibly be in this world—
1. On account of its *duration 263*
 2. By reason of that greater clearness with which the deformity of sin shall then be seen *ib.*
 3. Because for one who can know our sins now, millions shall know them hereafter *ib.*
- Concerns of salvation*, some too busy, others too idle, to attend them *245*
- Confession of sins*, humbly and sincerely made, is the only means to prevent their appearing against us at the last great day *261*
 — the easiness of the *condition* in order to obtain our *pardon ib.*
 — objection hereto, from *natural repugnancy*, answered *262*
 — highly recommendable for the present *ease and peace* it gives to the soul *264*
 — the confusion which attends it is, all grounded upon *mistake ib.*
- Confessor* is under the strictest obligations to an *inviolable secrecy ib.*
 — his esteem not lost but more gained by an humble and sincere confession *Page 264*
- Confidence in the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ* is a necessary qualification of *prayer 161*
- Conscience* filled with *scruples* is a treacherous guide *131*
- Contempt* of others for their faults, argues a disposition to *pride* in ourselves *113*
- Contempt and hatred* break the links of the chain which should unite the members of society *210*
 — of the world is man's greatest good in it *312*
- Contemptuous behaviour* towards our neighbour is a trespass against *charity 206*
- Contention* is far from a christian spirit *192*
- Contentions and heats* usually attending *disputes*, should prevent our contradicting persons in trifling and indifferent matters *198*
- Contradiction of another's sentiments*, if done, 1. With a decisive air; or, 2. With an air of contempt and disdain; or, 3. With an air of heat or passion; generally does more hurt than good *206, 207*
 — of another's sentiments, often done out of a proud conceit of ourselves *194, 195*
 — of another's sentiments, the causes which frequently render persons incapable of bearing it *194*
 — of another's sentiments, if not cautiously managed, is apt to irritate men's minds, and prevent its being in our power to do them good by our advice *ib.*
 — of

- of another's sentiments, not to be undertaken without a full evidence of his being in the wrong *Page* 194
- of another's sentiments, with modesty and proper precautions it may be both useful and necessary 202
- of another's sentiments, requires that we first study the humours and tempers of the persons we contradict 205
- of another's sentiments, if about small matters, is the more inexcusable 212
- Conversion* implies a detestation of sin for its own sake, as it is an offence against God 149
- Danger* of some very considerable prejudice to our neighbour's spiritual or temporal good will justify our contradicting him 197
- David* and *St. Mary Magdalen* remarkable examples of signal gratitude to God 169
- Death*, the remembrance of it bitter to the worldly minds 57
- Death* bed repentance, to depend thereon is tempting God 148
- an argument in favour of it answered 149
- its difficulty and danger 150
- Decisive and authoritative manner* of delivering our opinions seldom meets with the desired effect of convincing the judgment of the person spoken to 206
- Deliverance* from the bondage of sin, is so signal an act of divine mercy, as calls for the highest gratitude from us 167
- Denying* the lawfulness of desiring a share in the *Blessed Virgin's* prayers, and yet allowing the lawfulness of desiring sinners on earth to pray for us is a contradiction to common sense *Page* 233
- Despondency* or *despair* must be avoided 162
- Desire* of suffering for *Christ* eminent in the apostles and martyrs 104
- Desire* of the heart, the secret springs of our actions *ib.*
- Despair* of God's grace, and mercy must never be entertained in our hearts 94
- Devil* endeavours to drive men into despair 160
- is ready to nourish the hardness of heart in sinners 236
- in tempting men to sin, keeps shame from them; but after sin is committed he heightens shame as much as possible, to fill the sinner with confusion and difficulty of confessing 250
- endeavours to divert us from partaking of the holy Eucharist 292
- Devotion* which the Church pays to the *Blessed Virgin* is a relative honour, terminating wholly in God 214
- is warranted and marked out in the prophecy which she delivered of herself *ib.*
- if tempting to raise her above the rank of a pure creature is impiety and blasphemy *ib.*
- the doctrines of the catholic Church concerning it 215
- consists only in the imitation of her virtues 225
- objections against this practice, answered 231, 232
- no

- no more unlawful than to desire the assistance of the prayers of each other *Page 233*
- is a mark of our humility *ib.*
- the oftener repeated the better *ib.*
- Devotion &c.* the grounds on which it is built *ib.*
- pride* is one great cause of objection against it *234*
- Devotions* conducing to the amendment of life and directed to that end, are solid, and acceptable to God *228*
- or prayers, if abused to become an encouragement to sin, are a delusion and stratagem of the devil *ib.*
- morning and evening, and on *Sundays* and holidays ought not to be omitted *39*
- Discourse* in defence of vice is very dangerous and criminal *16*
- Dispute* or contradiction, if about small matters, is the more inexcusable *212*
- about religion is seldom found productive of any good effects *200*
- Diversions* or pleasures closely pursued, are inconsistent with making salvation our chief business *18*
- Duelling*, its great sinfulness, and enormity *17*
- Duties* of religion performed give peace and happiness to the soul *67, 72*
- Education* in the doctrines of incorrupt and catholic Faith, is a blessing which we ought to be very thankful to God for *233*
- Emulation* in youth, too often proves the nourishment of pride *199*
- End of our actions*, if terminating in any creature, is robbing God of the honour incommunicably due to him *Page 114*
- End of our actions*, for which we were created is to serve God, in order to enjoy him eternally in the life to come *70*
- Errors* in different matters, were not reproved by Christ, but only such wherein the honour of God or the good of souls was concerned *154*
- Esteem*, is emptiness and vanity *47*
- danger of its inflaming our hearts with pride *48*
- Ethai*, his conduct towards king David should be a pattern how we ought to behave towards Jesus Christ *89*
- Evangelical law* and corrupt nature, the opposition between them *74*
- Eucharist* is a more sovereign preservative against the corruptions of the world *42*
- how often it ought to be received *ib.*
- was instituted by Christ as a manifestation of his love, not only in leaving us an everlasting token to remember him by, but also to unite us firmly to himself, that we might be one with him, and he with us, that we might abide for ever in him, and he in us *286*
- is by some of the fathers called the extension of the incarnation;
1. Because whoever worthily communicates is made partaker thereby of the divinity and humanity to Christ; receives within himself really

- ly and substantially the same
divine person who once assum-
ed our nature in the womb
of the ever blessed Virgin
Page 287
2. Because as *Christ* by his
Incarnation was once born of
the *Virgin Mary*, so he is
hereby spiritually re-born in
the souls of all those who re-
ceive him worthily *ib.*
- Eucharist* causes a perfect union
betwixt *Christ* and us, thro'
sanctifying grace and cha-
rity *ib.*
- Excellencies*, whether real or
imaginary, are apt to inflame
the soul with pride 303
- Excess* in devotion dangerous, as
well as defects 131
- Experience* will be our guide in
teaching us to trace out the
secret springs of our passions,
that they may be eradicated
189
- Exposing* ourselves, to the occa-
sions of sin is tempting God
151
- External duties* such as prayer,
fasting, &c. not to be ne-
glected 112
- not to be rested in, as if
they alone sufficed to salva-
tion 113
- must be accompanied with
humility of heart, and chari-
ty to our neighbour *ib.*
- Faith* is necessary to obtain the
desired effect of our prayers
161
- Fear* of being thought better by
our spiritual directors than we
really are, is an artful snare
of the devil 130, 131
- merely servile is insufficient
to reconcile a sinner to God
149
- Festivals* instituted under the
Mosaic law were particu-
larly designed to renew an-
nually in the *Israelites* minds
a fresh grateful remembrance
of the various mercies God
had bestowed on them.
Page 165
- of the christian Church are
instituted to excite gratitude
in our hearts on the remem-
brance of the signal blessings
God has bestowed on his
Church 166
- the great number of days
set apart in honour of the
Blessed Virgin, shews the
great desire of the Church
to encourage devotion to her
213
- appointed to be observed
in honour of the *Blessed*
Virgin, are all solemn days,
and to be observed with a se-
rious and distinguished devo-
tions both publick and pri-
vate 229
- Final impenitency* and despair the
natural effects of sacrilegious
communions; especially if the
person be so unhappy as to
be overtaken by his last sick-
ness while he is guilty of the
crime 279
- Freedom of will* enables man to
choose the end of his actions
115
- Fretfulness* at the dispensations of
God's Providence, motives
against it 302
- Following Christ* consists in the
imitation of his virtues and the
practice of all those christi-
an duties that are suitable to
our state 170
- Fore-knowledge* of the ingrati-
tude of mankind did not hin-
der *Christ* from bestowing
upon us the pledge of his
love 284
- Forgiving and loving our ene-
mies*

- mies* is the indispensable condition on which we may expect to obtain from *Christ* the pardon of our own sins
 Page 183, 192
- Folly* of setting our hearts on any thing in this world 55
- Fore knowledge of God*, how few would embrace the mercy of redemption, yet did not prevent his love, from extending so great a mercy to mankind 86
- Future rewards* and punishments account for the difficulties in the various dispensations of God's Providence in this life 53
- God* having created us for himself, nothing but God can make us happy 72
- is not a rigid spy on our actions, but an indulgent Father 131
- sometimes refuses to grant our petitions at present, to make us redouble our importunity 160
- is oftentimes mercifully pleased to withdraw the world from us, when he sees us obstinately resolved not to withdraw our affections from the world 301
- Good christian*, no one so well bred as he 204
- Grace of Jesus Christ* strengthening us enables good persons to bear their afflictions 76
- Grace of Jesus Christ* is able to change the most corrupt heart 94
- Gratitude* and fidelity oblige us to be ready to lay down our lives for God, whenever he shall please to demand this instance of obedience from us 91
- Greatness* is filled with cares, exposed to envy and malice, often crushes those whom it has raised Page 46
- Gratitude to God* for grace received, is a means to obtain the continuance of it 167
- is a duty which all persons are capable of performing 168
- is always the effect of a sincere conversion 169
- for having forgiven us our past sins will lay us under a strong obligation of avoiding sin for the future 171
- Guests* invited in the *parable of the great supper* in the gospel, who refused to come, what sorts of persons are represented by them 290
- Hardness of heart* hinders the salvation of the soul, as it prevents the operations of divine grace 235
- signified by the seed sown by the *wayside* *ib.*
- Hatred of any person, even our enemy*, deprives us of the benefit of our *confession* and *penance*, loads us with the guilt of *sacrilegious confessions* and damns our souls for ever 184
- retained in our hearts against any person, when we say the *Lord's Prayer*, is either *mocking of God*, or *cursing ourselves* 185
- Hatred* deprives us of the fruit of all our other virtues 184
- involves the soul in mortal sin 189
- breaks the links of the chain which should unite us together as members of society 210
- none more irreconcilable than that of *married person*

- sons* Page 212
- Heat or passion in disputes* is always to be avoided,
1. Because it is apt to excite the same heat in others, and occasion a breach of peace and charity 208
 2. Because it looks like offering violence to a man's reason *ib.*
 3. Because it gives ground to suspect that we adhere to our own opinions more out of passion or prejudice than reason *ib.*
 4. Because passion obscures reason, and disables us from defending truth with advantage *ib.*
- Heats or contentions*, usually attending disputes, should prevent our contradicting persons in trifling or indifferent matters 198
- Human nature* is more inclined to *pride* than to *despair* 303
- must have some grains of allowance for its weakness and infirmity 246
- Humility* will guard us from *tempting God* 152
- will always make us diffident of our own judgment 316
- Humility*, rarely found in men in prosperity 302
- Humors and tempers* of persons to be studied before we attempt to contradict them 207
- Idle Christian*, his danger 19
- Jesus Christ*, in suffering such a painful death, underwent more than was absolutely necessary for man's redemption, all which over-plus his love engaged him to suffer for our example and instruction 87
- alone, is the only mediator of redemption Page 217
- has immediate access to God, without the mediation of any other *ib.*
- salvation to be had only through him *ib.*
- by the *Eucharist* incorporates himself with us, and becomes, as it were, one flesh with us 287
- Jewish doctors* by their interpretations and traditions, had very much corrupted the *Mosaick law* 173
- Inconstancy*, and *irresolution* hinder the salvation of the soul 238
- Inconstancy*, the cause of it enquired into 239
- Ingratitude* is a vice most odious both to God and man 164
- particularly provokes God to withdraw his liberality 165
- Inordinate affection* to creatures to be avoided 115
- Inspirations to virtue*, when left within us, must be seasonably improved 158
- Interest* obliges us to forgive and love our enemies 183
- Job's friends* directed by God himself to apply to *Job* to pray for them; which both warrants the practice and shews the reasonableness of our making interest with some friend of God, such as the *Blessed Virgin* is, to pray for us 224
- John Baptist*, (St.) in prison is the comfort and instruction of all suffering christians 308
- is a remarkable instance of God's love to us in visiting us with afflictions 309
- Judas*, as he was the first instance

- stance of unworthy *communi-
ons*, so is he a tremendous
example of the judgments
of God which await that sin,
in his reprobation, blindness,
and obduracy and final
despair *Page 278*
- Judgment of spiritual directors*
is the safest rule to follow
131
- Justice*, what it is 107
- Kingdom of God* to be sought
for in the first place 5
- Libertines*, who by their dis-
course turn religion into ri-
dicule and a jest, are to be
avoided above all persons
36
- Life of Christ* is to be the mo-
del of ours 88
- Life*, we may give it for *Christ*,
tho' we have not the oppor-
tunity of laying it down in
martyrdom 92
- Livelihood* by unlawful means,
not to be sought after 16
- Life and health* afford a sinner
leisure to work himself out
of habits of sin into a course
of virtue; which cannot
easily be done on a *death
bed* 149
- Living in sin* in hopes of re-
penting at one's last sickness
is *tempting God* 148
- Love of ourselves*, its danger,
21
- of *God* above all things,
wherein it consists 13
- which is predominant in
the hearts of the just, ena-
bles them to bear afflictions,
not only with ease, but with
delight and pleasure 79
- of *Christ* in suffering and
dying for us 83
- exceeding great, which
induced him to suffer mock-
ery, and ignominy, and the
death on the Cross, for us
Page 87
- should engage us to gra-
titude and love to him
again 89
- Love* takes away all difficul-
ties 78
- Love of Christ* towards us,
should make us earnestly de-
sire and long after an union
with him 289
- in instituting the sacra-
ment of the *holy Eucharist*
shewed the earnest desire he
had to bestow this blessing on
us 282
- Love of God* above all things
must have the first place in
our hearts 114
- cancels not our obligation
to love and please each other
according to our several stati-
ons 116
- Love of the world*, which de-
grades the soul is removed by
afflictions 305
- of *charity* and *natural af-
fection*, the difference be-
tween them 150
- which we owe to our neigh-
bour, consists in a sincere de-
sire of the heart to do him
good for God's sake *ib.*
- has a strong influence on
men's actions 114
- Loving and forgiving our enemies*
is the indispensable condi-
tion, on which we may ex-
pect to obtain from *Christ*
the pardon of our own sins
185, 190
- largely treated of, both
in the first and in the last
sermon of our Saviour
175, 176
- is peculiarly and empha-
tically a new commandment
instituted by *Christ* 178
- enforced on us at the time
of

- of his death, that it might come the more effectually recommended and endeared to us *Page* 178
- Luke-warmness*, wherein it consists 118
- subjects men to many sins, 1. of *omission*, 2. of the *tongue*, 3. of *thought*, as *rash judgments*, &c. and to fall into many snares which even the most cautious do not always avoid 126
- Lukewarm christian* endeavours to enlarge the narrow way to Heaven as much as may be, by satisfying both conscience and self-love at the same time 119
- Luke-warm christian*, screens himself under the colour of moderation 120
- encroaches upon the commandments, as far as he thinks he may without transgressing in any thing notoriously criminal 118, 124
- makes no account of *venial sins* 124
- never aspires to any degree of perfection *ib.*
- performs all duties unwillingly, indifferently, and by halves 122
- is in danger of having as many *sacrileges* to answer for, as he makes *confessions* or *communions* in that state *ib.*
- cannot be said to *seek first the kingdom of God*, but is got plainly into the broad way which leads to perdition 123
- may easily imagine himself to be in God's favour when he is in mortal sin 125, 128
- is in great danger of continuing in his state of *epidity* *Page* 127
- apt to fall into pride, by comparing his life with that of a libertine 128
- is the case of the slothful servant mentioned in the gospel *ib.*
- is directly opposite to the christian of a scrupulous conscience 129
- is difficult to be cured 130
- is negligent in receiving the *Communion*, and remiss in his preparation for it 290
- Lusts* and *sinful passions* will strive hard for mastery and conquest within the soul 159
- and other vices are far beneath the dignity of our nature, and the end for which we are created 9
- Lying* is an odious quality both before God and man 252
- hateful to God, because directly opposite to one of his attributes, *i. e.* Truth 253
- so infamous among men, that it is the greatest affront that can be offered, to be charged with it *ib.*
- several degrees of this sin 254
- *children* to be brought up in the greatest abhorrence of the practice of it 258
- out of the *confessional*, if grown into a habit, is a fair step towards *lying in confession* *ib.*
- in *confession*, worse than the sin of *Ananias* and *Sapphira* 357
- the extreme danger of it *ib.*
- necessity of retracting it while we have it yet in our power, by an immediate faithful

- faithful confession *Page* 258
Mankind, considered as one great family, over which God is the Sovereign Lord, who has assigned to each of us our respective *post* and *station*; which points out to us our employment and particular duty 9
Martyrs, were enabled cheerfully to undergo the most cruel torments, through their love to *Jesus Christ* 80
Maxims of the Gospel bind not only religious but all persons whatsoever 31
Mental prayer highly recommendable 41
Mercy, extended from God to sinful man more than to Angels 85
Mode of the world is generally prevalent 30
Morning and Evening devotions, and on *Sundays* and holidays, ought not to be omitted 39
Mary Magdalen (St.) remarkable in her *gratitude* to *Christ* for the grace of her conversion, and *courage* in her attendance on him 169
Marriage too commonly undertaken on merely human motives 146
— the will of God ought to be consulted in it *ib.*
— advice of parents and friends to be taken therein *ib.*
— if rashly undertaken it generally lays the foundation of future troubles and misery, and of a fruitless repentance 147
Married persons ought, with the greatest imaginable constancy and diligence, to study all lawful means of endearments, tenderness of affection, and mutual compliances *Page* 211
— coldness or indifferency between them is but one remove from hatred and aversion 212
Martyrs, their example to be imitated by us 132
Martyrdom is the strongest proof that can be given of our ardent desire to be united to *Christ* for ever 133
— for the sake of *Christ*, will not save a soul who dies in malice or hatred towards any person 189
Matters of indifference, not worthy contradicting our neighbour's sentiments about 197
Men of business, are apt to give up their minds to it, so as not to be at leisure to attend the concerns of their souls 145
— of leisure, should employ much of their spare time in religious duties 146
— should find some serious employment, either for the honour of God, their own improvement, or the service of their neighbour, to fill up great part of the vacant hours of their time 147
Modest contradiction, may on certain occasions be both useful and acceptable 202
Mortal sin, every one is an increase of the death of the soul 275
Mutual love and esteem is the only lasting bond of society 210
Natural infirmities must have some allowance made 105
— affections, consistent with the order of God's providence; are certainly our duty 58
Natural

Natural right in all men to use their own reason Page 206

Neglect either of soul or body is tempting God 144

— of the *Eucharist*, the ill consequence thereof to the soul 292

— argues a greater concern for our worldly, than for our spiritual interest 296

— is an affront to *Christ*; and a proof that we prefer our own ease, or pleasure, or worldly profit before him 292

Negligent cold receiving of the Eucharist, shews but little regard to the intention of *Christ* to continue and abide with us 293

Nobility and gentry, when wicked, give a most mortal wound to christianity 6

Occasion is a dangerous temptation to sin 151

Occasions of sin, tho' not sinful in themselves, must be carefully guarded against 243

Opportunity, present, of offered grace, must be improved, lest, if neglected, it should never return 157

Outward forms and tokens of civility shew the inward respect and love we bear each other, and are a duty we owe to every person, as members of civil society 210

Passion of Christ, why called a baptism 96

Patience and resignation to God's will, in all our sufferings, is our duty 102

Pardon of our sins, to be obtained through the intercession of the *Blessed Virgin*, is the doctrine of (St.) *Chrysostome* 215

Passing over affronts, without demanding satisfaction, will expose christians to the jests and reproach of the world; all which we must prepare ourselves to bear, if we desire to be owned by *Christ* Page 139

Patience, motives to this great duty 302

Perfection, ought to be our desire and endeavour, according to the measure of our strength 142

Persecution from the world, loss of liberty, goods, or life, poverty, ruin of families, &c. which the world may threaten us with, all must be patiently born rather than wound our consciences mortally 140

Persecutions or censures from the world must not discourage us from our duty 158

Perseverance in virtue absolutely necessary 160

Persons of quality and authority ought to be spoken to with deference and respect 204

Pharisaical virtue, what it was 107
— wherein it was defective *ib.*

Peace of mind, the result of a good conscience 11

Play-houses, the great danger of frequenting them 37

Pleasure or diversions closely pursued, are inconsistent with making salvation our chief business 9

— even such as are lawful must be used with caution and restraint 45

Pleasures, greatness, esteem, and riches, are vain and contemptible; because, 1. They are

- are mixed; 2. Their duration is short; 3. They generally end in everlasting sorrow Page 45
- of *sense*, dearly purchased at the price of everlasting misery 65
- Poor persons*, have no reason to repine at their condition 60
- are in a safer way than rich to secure their eternal interest 64
- Prayer*, is a preservative against the corruption of the world 39
- in the morning and evening necessary ib.
- Pleasures*, tho' indifferent in themselves, are apt to engage the heart in an immoderate affection for them 135
- corrupt the hearts of men, who have not business enough of the world to employ them 246
- Poverty* affords matter of comfortable reflection 301
- Prayer*, necessary for the strength and nourishment of our souls 144
- Neglect of it is tempting God ib.
- Vigorous perseverance therein, absolutely necessary 160
- joined with *spiritual reading* is a profitable employment for men of leisure 246
- Prayer of St. Chrysostom* to the Ever-Blessed Virgin 216
- Prayers of saints and angels* in Heaven, as well as of the faithful on earth, are all offered up through the mediation of *Jesus Christ* 217
- Prayers* which we offer up to God, will never be more acceptable, than when we prevail with the *Blessed Virgin* to undertake the presenting them to *Almighty God*, thro' the medium of her dear Son Page 224
- for the intercession of the *Blessed Virgin*, without a desire of quitting habits of sin will avail nothing 226
- or other devotions, if abused to become an encouragement to continue in sin as a delusion and stratagem of the devil 228
- Prayers to the Blessed Virgin*, or to other saints, is an expression as proper as praying to one another; and is of common use, signifying no more than desiring them to join their prayers with ours, and to pray with us and for us 232
- Preparation of soul*, necessary to qualify us for a worthy communion 168
- Prepossession of the mind*, or prejudice of education renders a person incapable of bearing contradiction 196
- Preservation* to be expected through the ordinary means of God's providence 144
- Pride of heart*, contempt of others, and vain glory were the great vices of the *Pharisees* 111
- Pride of heart* &c. and an opinion of our own superior judgment, is too frequently the cause of our contradicting another person's sentiments 198
- transformed *Lucifer* and his apostate angles into devils 113
- is the ordinary root of tempting God 152
- is easily blown up in our souls with every trifle 303
- Priest,*

- Priest*, officiating in the sacred tribunal of penance, acts as God's representative, and the public minister of Jesus Christ
Page 252
- Prodigal son*, in the parable in the gospel, affords us an instance of the bewitching nature of sinful or earthly pleasures, and the benefit of afflictions 299
- Prosperity* is dangerous to the soul 304
- Provocation* or *affronts*, how great soever, cannot cancel our obligation of loving our enemies 179
- Quality*, riches, power, and other worldly advantages as they are apt to puff up the mind with pride, so they usually render persons positive in their opinions, and incapable of bearing contradiction 195
- Rational creatures* are bound to make it their chief business to attain the end for which they were created 8
- Readiness* in the preparation of our heart, to lay down our lives for the sake of Christ, is at all times our duty 132
- Reformation* from a vicious course of life will expose men to the jests and insults of their former lewd companions 139
- Relapsing* frequently into mortal sin after communion, not only frustrates the design of our Saviour in instituting the Eucharist, but also gives reason to fear that in former communications we have seldom received him by his grace into our souls 288
- Reproaches* will never convince the judgment, where reason fails 161
- Resignation to God's will*, and patience in all our sufferings, is our duty Page 102
- Resentment* for injuries, when we act in contradiction to it, is consistent with charity 190
—is notwithstanding a dangerous temptation, which we ought to be very jealous of *ib.*
- Retirement*, inward prayer and meditation necessary after communion 296
- Rich persons* are the most remarkably guilty of scandalous irregularities 300
- Riches*, if not abused by their possessors, would rather forward than hinder their salvation 245
—expose the souls of men to dangers 302
—apt to lead men into the folly of imagining themselves to be, as it were, a class of beings superior to the rest of mankind 304
- Riches* rarely found joined with humility in the same person 303
—never procure to any man a full and unmixed satisfaction 49
- Rising of the blood*, with aversion, at the sight of any person, is a strong indication of malice in the heart against him 189
- Rosary or beads*, the advantages of saying those prayers 230
—carries the mind weekly through a contemplation of all the mysteries of man's redemption *ib.*
—suited to all capacities and states of life *ib.*
—objections against them answered *ib.*
- Sacrament of penance*, the neglect

- glect of it is owing to *sloth or shame* Page 249
- Sacraments and spiritual reading* are excellent preservatives against the corruptions of the world 41
- Sacrifice* offered to the *Blessed Virgin*, would be *sacrilege* and idolatry 217
- Sacrilege* what it is 269
- how severely God has punished it in this life 271
- Sacrilegious confessions* usually lead the way to unworthy communion 269
- Salvation* to be had only thro' *Jesus Christ*, who is the mediator of our redemption 217
- Scrupulosity* is not a help but hindrance to devotion 129
- Seeking first the kingdom of God* wherein it consists 16
- has a necessary and immediate connexion with the duty of loving God above all things 13
- Self-love* is apt to consider afflictions as evils 308
- its danger 21
- Sensual lusts and pleasures* carry away the soul from attending to divine inspirations; and prevent a desire or endeavour after any preparation for receiving *Christ* in the *holy Eucharist* 291
- Service of God* is suitable to the dignity of human nature 9
- Serving God* on earth is the means to qualify us to enjoy God in Heaven 11
- Shame and confusion* is of two kinds: One which the penitent feels within himself in confession; which is rewarded with grace in this life, and eternal glory in the next: And a second, which, by hindering a sinner from confessing, fills the soul with remorse, and aggravated guilt and causes everlasting death, if not atoned for Page 261
- in the world to come, for concealment of sins in confession, at present, shall be infinitely greater than any confusion possible in this world 262
- and remorse immediately rush in upon the soul, after the use of unlawful pleasures 46
- Sin* is a continual torment to the conscience 264
- is the greatest evil that can befall any one, and deliverance from it is the greatest good 156
- a sense of its evil will cause an earnest desire to be delivered from it 157
- Sinful passions* indulged, render the performance of our duty difficult 240
- are a heavy weight and bias on the heart, to draw it from its duty 241
- signified by the rock in the parable, on which the seed was sown 170
- means by which they must be rooted out of the heart 242
- even any one of them, habitually indulged, is sufficient to damn a soul for ever 63
- Sinners*, truly converted, will find themselves obliged to a constant uniform practice of devotion 170
- stand most in need of a powerful advocate at the throne of grace, and therefore should constantly implore the assistance of the prayers of the *Blessed Virgin* 225, 227
- two

- two kinds of them: 1.
Such as use no serious en-
deavours, to be delivered
from their sinful state: 2.
Such as, though they fall
into relapses, yet sincerely
desire to be delivered from
that state Page 226
- set up *idols* in their hearts
and make their *vices* their
God, by making them their
last or *ultimate end* 12
- Sloth*, or a neglect of salvation,
thro' a constant pursuit of
worldly pleasures, is a great
sin 20
- Slothful christians*, thro' neglect
of prayer, receive not grace,
and perish 144
- Solemn days*, the great number
of them set apart in honour
of the *Blessed Virgin*, shews
the great desire of the
Church to encourage devo-
tion to her 213
- Solicitude* and *riches* are great
hindrances to salvation 245
- are signified by the *thorns*
in the *parable*, which choak
the growing corn 244
- ruin souls by involving
them in too much of the bu-
siness of this world 245
- Solomon* enjoyed so large a share
of all temporal goods, as
well qualified him to judge
of their real value; and de-
clares them mere vanity 52
- Soul* is degraded by setting our
affections on things of this
world 169
- will lose its strength and
life, without being continu-
ally supplied with the spiri-
tual food of the *Eucharist*
293
- Spirit of contention*, whence it
proceeds 192
- Spiritual martyrdom*, wherein it
consists Page 132, 142
- the great similitude be-
twixt it and corporal death
134
- Combat betwixt flesh and
spirit necessary to it, and
for which we must prepare
with great resolution 135
- Spiritual martyrdom* requires our
breaking off all manner of
correspondency with the
flesh, .i. e. all criminal car-
nal desires 135
- restrains the use and exer-
cise of the senses, and even
of diversions indifferent in
themselves, to a christian
moderation 138
- requires us to sustain a vi-
gorous conflict with the ma-
lice and injustice, the rail-
eries and persecutions of the
world *ib.*
- Spiritual death* admits of many
degrees 142
- blindness*, a sense of it, is
the first step towards a cure
155
- reading and prayer*, a pro-
fitable employment for men
of leisure 146
- Strength of imagination* often
renders a man less disposed
to bearing contradiction 194
- Sufferings of this life*, have
great advantages, which
should dispose us to a pati-
ent submission to them 298
- apt to be fancied easy,
while they are at a distance
306
- render us conformable
to the example of *Christ*, our
Lord 314
- if rightly used, will
make us happy in the life to
come 65
- Suffering for Christ*, the desire
of it eminent in the apostles
and

- and martyrs *Page* 104
 ———Christians feel a joy in
 it 80
 ———is always our duty, and
 in many instances it is in
 every one's power 91
Sundays and holidays to be re-
 ligiously observed 39
Temporal concerns, may be made
 subservient to spiritual 23
 ———a reasonable care in them
 necessary 58
Tempting God, the sin of it 143
Things present, are apt strong-
 ly to affect us 61
Things commanded by Christ are
 perfect but not impossible
 172
Thwarting and contradicting
temper often screens itself
 under a pretence of charity
 to our neighbour 196
 ———betwixt married persons
 is of the most fatal conse-
 quence 211
Tobias, his history furnishes us
 with a remarkable instance
 of the love of God towards
 us in visiting us with afflic-
 tions 309
Vice exists in many instances
 more than the world calls by
 that name 20
 ———of all kinds commonly
 practised by all ranks, even
 of the highest station, of
 persons calling themselves
 christians 6
Virtuous life, the happiness that
 attends it even in this world
 66
 ———*Actions*, St. *Austin's* sense
 of them after his conversion
 69
Virtue, tho' it manifests itself
 by outward actions, yet is
 seated in the heart alone 113
Union of the soul to God by grace
here, will be perfected by
Glory hereafter *Page* 71
Union of the soul, &c. fills the
 soul with as much solid peace
 and content as it is capable
 of in this mortal state 72
 ———and harmony in society is the
 order and disposition of God's
 providence 209
Unworthy communion, is sacrilege
 in the highest degree; and
 will be punished with the ut-
 most rigour 269, 270
 ———severely punished in this
 life 271
 ———will meet with the sever-
 est vengeance in the life to
 come 274
 ———in this life delivers up the
 soul to invisible plagues 275
Unworthy communion, instantly
 confirms to the sacrilegious
 communicant, the sentence of
 eternal damnation 277
 ———yet by sincere and timely
 repentance of the offender,
 this sentence may be rever-
 sed 278
Unworthy communicants, harder
 to be reclaimed out of the
 power of the devil than other
 sinners *ib.*
 ———will find it much their
 safest and easiest way to im-
 prove the present time by a
 serious repentance; and to
 repair the faults of their sa-
 crilegious communions 280
Want brought the prodigal son
 to a sense of his duty 299
 ———of sufficient employment in
 the world exposes men to
 dangers from sinful pleasures
 242
Want of love and charity in our
 hearts, deprives us of the
 fruit of all our other virtues
 185
 ———opens the way to apostacy;
 a remarkable instance of
 which

- which we have in the fall of
Sapricius when just at the
 point of martyrdom *Page* 186
- Whole world*, no sufficient com-
 pensation for the loss of a
 man's soul 61
- Wicked life* wants not its thorns
 and uneasiness in this world ;
 while virtue, however diffi-
 cult in appearance fills the
 soul with joy and satisfaction 72
- World* is apt to censure and
 give a malicious turn to the
 actions of good men 159
- its vanity discovered clear-
 ly to us by afflictions 299
- is full of traps and snares
 to our souls *Page* 127
- Worldly men* are so deeply im-
 pressed in the cares of their
 temporal concerns, that they
 can find no time to attend on
Christ, in the holy Sacrament 291
- Worldly joys* are very short in
 their duration 50—57
- subject to continual inter-
 ruptions 52
- only the seeds of everlast-
 ing torments 53
- cannot give content to the
 mind, nor satisfy the enlarg-
 ed desires of the soul 56, 72
- Worldly-mindedness*, its folly 23

F I N I S.

